






## Final Report

*This report was prepared by the World Forum for Democracy Secretariat on the basis of the key elements issued by the various sessions as well as the hard work of the team of rapporteurs.*

*It intends to improve the understanding of the topics and to promote all related recommendations.*

*Most innovative and impactful lab initiatives are directly mentioned within the text body with the aim of supporting main conclusions, while the info boxes highlight key contributions offered by other sessions.*

<b>Labs</b>	
<b>Satellite events</b>	
<b>Infobox</b>	

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# Conclusions and recommendations

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The seventh edition of the World Forum for Democracy, entitled “Gender equality – Whose battle?” gathered more than 2000 participants from over 80 countries, including about 400 graduates from the Council of Europe Schools of Political Studies.

This year’s Forum focused on two issues: why, despite a century of democratic progress, gender equality has not yet been achieved; and at what it takes to end prejudice, discrimination and violence against women in our societies. The Forum’s main finding was that while indeed democracy is still not inclusive, progress has been made. There is a phenomenon of growing awareness and involvement from men and women alike, together in the fight for equality: it is a common battle.

## Who’s still afraid of gender equality?

*“When a woman goes into politics her life changes, when many women go into politics life changes”*  
(Michelle Bachelet)

Gender equality is a human right and a longstanding area of policy-making that has recently been at the forefront of the political agenda. From the powerful #MeToo movement to the broad social backlash against male impunity for violence against women, the persistence of heavy stereotyping and discrimination in social life; stakeholders from all walks of life have called for effective legal and other measures to address structural barriers to gender equality. The Forum focused on strategies to eradicate gender-based violence and discrimination against women. In doing so, it looked at the unequal power relations between women and men which lies at the heart of gender inequality. Gender inequality creates discrimination, entrenches gender stereotypes and prevents women and men, girls and boys from equally reaching their full potential in the workplace, at home and in society at large – with the brunt weighing more heavily on women and girls. But it is in the interests of everyone – women and men – that gender equality should be tackled in a systemic, effective and lasting way.

Obstacles to achieving gender equality are still significant. The nature and magnitude of these

obstacles may vary from countries to localities, being very much influenced by cultural contexts, with gender inequalities present in all areas of society. In times of economic crises, their effect is often to entrench more traditional views of gender roles. In recent years, the action and influence of various conservative groups organised to dismantle decades of progress in women’s rights call for vigilance and commitment at by all.

## Time to act

The time to act against the multiple disadvantages women continue to face is **now**. The necessary policies and legislation have been in place for decades, but there is still broad scope for action and change in many countries across the world to prevent further backlash and swifter progress. Progress is more effective when changes are introduced in the systems themselves, overcoming resistance and bringing about the necessary cultural shifts and the benefits to the whole of society – women and men – can be shown.

## Quotas – gender mainstreaming: musts

The participants in the Forum recognised that effective gender quotas are necessary in both politics and business, but they need to be accompanied by the development of a culture of gender equality in political institutions and in an economy that is free of discrimination, sexism and harassment, thus enabling women to thrive, including in positions of responsibility. However, the progress needed goes beyond the number of women elected and the posts they hold: it must be integrated into policy-making. Gender must be mainstreamed in all policies, and at all levels, together with positive measures such as quotas.

## Eradicating gender stereotypes – ending violence

Breaking down conscious and unconscious gender stereotypes must be the starting point for tackling gender inequalities. Gender stereotypes also affect the fight against gender-based violence, as they have an impact on the capacity of victims to react which often means that the perpetrators are not being held accountable for their acts. All forms of violence against women need to be eliminated through prevention measures, as well as through ending impunity, by encouraging victims – with the

appropriate support and protection measures – to report transgressions, and by prosecuting every instance of violence. Addressing violence against women and breaking down sex-based discrimination, sexism and gender stereotypes need to go hand in hand.

#### **Language, education and media**

Ensuring gender-sensitive education schemes, notably by educating young men and women on gender equality issues, human rights principles, mutual respect, dignity and anti-discrimination, is essential. Inclusive strategies should target men in particular, so as to involve them in promoting and

“normalising” gender equality. Semantics hold true power in issues related to gender-equality: non-sexist and gender-sensitive language and portrayals need to be introduced in all sectors of society, especially the media. Gender bias also needs to be addressed in the field of digitalisation/Artificial Intelligence due to the high risk of big data reproducing stereotypes leading to potential discrimination/disadvantages for women. In order to unleash the great promise these technologies hold for all of humanity, algorithms and data should be free of bias and should not reinforce stereotypes and inequalities in our societies.

## Recommendations

### To governments

- Introduce targeted measures for gender-equal representation in all areas of public and political decision-making to ensure transparency when appointing members to high-ranking positions and statutory bodies;
- Encourage the adoption of quotas by political parties and introduce effective quota legislation accompanied by sanctions (for example by partially withholding public subsidies from political parties for election campaigns, where applicable);
- Promote mandatory gender quotas in the public and private sectors;
- Develop laws which proscribe acts, words, gestures and behaviours expressing sexism or contempt of a person based on gender
- Ratify and implement the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention and adopt legislation that protects women from discrimination and all forms of gender-based violence (including sexual abuse, rape, physical, psychological and economic violence, verbal abuse, mutilation, torture and trafficking);
- Take measures to prevent sexual abuse and violence, for example through training and awareness-raising campaigns and programmes targeting all members of society;
- Ensure that preventative measures toward creating safe spaces for women in politics and in the public space are not gender binary but also take into account other forms of discrimination;
- Reform parental leave and other care leave schemes (paid or unpaid) in such a way so as to achieve equality between women and men in sharing care work, for example through non-transferable entitlements for each parent;
- Ensure the implementation of a gender mainstreaming strategy in all areas of policy-making;
- Introduce and apply measures such as gender-budgeting to make resource allocation more inclusive and gender-sensitive;

- Systematically support gender equality issues in foreign policy and diplomacy (“feminist diplomacy”);
- Ensure gender equality in all aspects of education systems and provide education and training opportunities for young women so as to strengthen their capacity to become economically active and independent.

### To Parliaments

- Act assertively against sexist behaviour and violence against women;
- Establish independent and effective mechanisms to which women and men may turn to in the event of being subject to gender-based violence and ensure that parliamentary immunity is not a barrier to legal action against sexual harassment;
- Put in place measures ensuring that gender equality issues are taken into account in all areas.

### To political parties

- Fully implement quota legislation as relevant and introduce voluntary quotas for elections and in relation to internal mechanisms and procedures, coupled with effective monitoring;
- Work with national women’s rights organisations as external partners in gender equality policy-making and monitoring processes;
- Provide active training and mentoring opportunities to women party members, thus fostering their capacity and ambition to fill high-level positions and train parties’ leaders on gender equality issues;
- Establish mandatory conflict resolution training and create bodies for reporting discrimination and abuse, as well as mechanisms to give an effective response to reports.

### To media and audiovisual industry

- Assure visibility of data/reports on gender equality issues and political representatives’ engagement relating to gender equality, thereby increasing transparency and accountability for the benefit of the public;

- Eliminate, expose and deconstruct sexist representations, discourse to denounce misogyny and stereotypes, and to educate and foster change;
- Use gender-sensitive language and portrayals as promoters of change;
- Employ more women in prominent positions (e.g. commentators, news anchors) and in media decision-making;
- Create/join transnational journalism partnerships to promote gender equality and to expose gender-related abuse;
- Move away from unconscious constructs of expected “quality” which tend to favour male creators, focusing instead on more objective criteria such as the relevance of the story for the audience, originality and filmmaking.

#### To the private sector

- Establish concrete measures to enable women to pursue a successful career, including equality and equal pay action plans and mentoring schemes, particularly in traditionally male-dominated areas (e.g. in the so-called STEM sectors);
- Act for the prevention of sexism, sexual abuse and violence in the workplace, for example through internal regulations, training and awareness-raising workshops;
- Create awareness of, and eliminate, gender markers in consumer goods, services and advertisements;
- Strive to include genuine gender equality as a value of corporate culture, including by tackling all forms of overt and hidden gender bias in internal structures and processes, and exert peer pressure on competitors to do the same.

#### To Civil Society

- Ensure gender balance in decision-making and the integration of a gender equality perspective in programmes and activities;

- Consider ways to enhance collaboration between NGOs in order to avoid duplicating efforts and competing for funding for gender equality projects;
- Mix social media and new communication tools with field-centered campaigning to raise awareness so as to involve and reach the whole of society and its actors.

#### To International Organisations

- Contribute to the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence, based on the provisions of the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention;
- Ensure the gathering, analysis and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data in all areas in order to support evidence-based policies on gender equality;
- Support the work of non-governmental organisations active in the area of gender equality and women’s rights and collaborate with them to ensure change.

#### To the Council of Europe:

- Support the full implementation and monitoring of existing Council of Europe gender equality-related standards and ensure regular exchanges with other regional mechanisms and their follow-up;
- Encourage and support the appropriate resourcing of policies, programmes, institutional mechanisms and non-governmental organisations, including women’s organisations in the area of women’s rights and gender equality;
- Ensure the full implementation of a gender mainstreaming strategy within all sectors and bodies of the Organisation.

## A word from the speakers

*“What I like about quotas is the obligation of results. We have other means, tools, but the difference with quotas is the obligations of results.”* Gabriella Battaini-Dragnoni, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe

*“Today, there is no such thing as equal representation. Today, we have equal rights in Europe, but not always equal opportunities.”* Philippe Muyters, Flemish Minister for Work, Economy, Innovation and Sport

*“Equal rights, equal pay... this is key. But I would hate if we forgot the simple right to live which is unfortunately yet to be achieved in some places.”* Claude Chirac, Vice-President of the Chirac Foundation

*“That means that people in the industry, leaders, have to transform the relations. We cannot expect individual women to fight that battle on their own: we have to see beyond the pay gap, beyond the way in which organisations have women in those roles. We also have to ensure that it is not just one workshop a year that happens around Gender Equality. That means that misogyny is talked about daily, that we talk about sexual harassment, that we talk about the violence and barriers that women experience, that we educate our media and journalist to write in ways that actually respect women.”* Farrah Khan, Manager, Consent Comes First, Sexual Violence Support and Education, Ryerson University, member of the Gender Equality Advisory Council for Canada’s G7 Presidency

*“Unless we approach the problem with structural coordinated policies to deal with violence against women, it won’t come to an end.”* Feride Acar, President of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)

*“Time is now. If we don’t get this right, right now, if we don’t have zero tolerance for Gender Inequality right now, today, we’re never going to achieve that really critical Sustainable Development Goal.”* H.E. Rosemary McCarney, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations and to the Conference on Disarmament

*“As a journalist I struggle on how to be impartial about my own story. The people who use #MeToo are not necessarily telling their stories to accuse certain people, they want to question the society and tell their story, same as me.”* Shiori Ito, Journalist from Japan

*“Surviving not only for themselves but also on behalf of other victims or potential victims is sometimes the destiny for women.”* Lady Ngo Mang, Women’s rights specialist, TV journalist

*“Policies don't solve problems. People solve problems.”* Mala Htun, Professor of Political Science, University of New Mexico

*“When women progress, equality will progress and the humanity will progress as well.”* Dolores Delgado, Spanish Minister of Justice



*“Women are not a minority. We are 52% of the population. We are in fact a majority, a discriminated against majority. We are being very modest in asking for 50%. We could be asking for 52%!”* Marlène Schiappa, French Minister of State for Gender Equality and anti-discrimination

*"Achieving equality is the responsibility of all of us. We need to strive to change mentalities, stereotypes, policies and practices. This battle can only be won by all of us."* Marija Pejčinović Burić, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Croatia

*“HeforShe is HeforSheforWe. This is a universal agenda with profound consequences for all humanity”.* Adam Lupel, Vice-President of International Peace Institute

*"Out of almost 1500 peace agreements, only 25 of them explicitly discuss the role of women in the implementation of these peace agreements. What would our history look like if women were more involved in decision making during the past centuries?"* Yves Leterme, Secretary General of International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA)

*“No country in the world has achieved de facto gender equality in the world as of now.”* Karin Nordmeyer, President, UN Women National Committee for Germany

*“It is important to transform the challenges into opportunities by looking at the issues beyond the form of our institutions –which is important- but go further, into social norms and stereotypes against women which I think is an important root cause of gender inequality.”* Naoko Ueda, Deputy Director of the OECD Development Centre in Paris

# Gender Equality: myriad struggles?



Salles

Defining Gender Equality and what it entails has been at the forefront of the WFD 2018. Responses given by WFD panellists, initiatives, speakers and audience alike highlighted the fact that inequality is first and foremost a deeply rooted cultural issue.

Issues of violence, sexism and discrimination (1), of power relations in politics and economics (2) were indeed always linked to education and archaic trains of thoughts/patriarchal traditions. Campaigning and awareness raising for women's rights (3) emphasised that answers, as much as understanding the issues have to take into account geographical and cultural differences, central in this year's topic.

For the first time ever there are more countries backsliding instead of improving in terms of democratic performance. This has to do with the conception of civic space and how populations live together and communicate (media, shrinking civic space, reducing rights...). It directly impacts Gender Equality and women's rights, as they represent more than half of the world's population. As a vulnerable category they suffer the most from negative democratic and economic changes. The WFD Time for Facts session was very clear: if everyone cannot participate in democracy, then it is not functioning. With this backslide, space for authoritarian systems is created (issues addressed during WFD 2017) and Gender Equality becomes politicised or even partisan.



Salles

## 1. Violence: the heart of the problem

The topic of violence against women has been pivotal to this year's World Forum for Democracy. It is in direct correlation with the issues of power. Regardless of the geographical area, it is widely spread, too often tolerated and needs to be fought against.



Violence against women (VAW) is a structural and global phenomenon that knows no social, economic or national boundaries. It is a serious violation of human rights and remains widely unsanctioned. Every day in Europe, women are psychologically and physically abused in the "safety" of their own homes, stalked, harassed, raped, mutilated, forced by their family to enter into marriage, or sterilised against their will. The examples of violence against women are endless, its victims countless. National and European surveys and awareness-raising campaigns have shown how widespread domestic and sexual violence are. The revelations of the #MeToo movement across Europe cast a light on the extent of sexual abuse of women and the difficulty for women to speak out against it. Many women are too afraid or ashamed to seek help, at times paying for their silence with their lives. Those that do speak out are not always heard. Domestic violence is another far too common form of violence that affects mostly women, but also men, children and the elderly. Few perpetrators are tried; fewer are sentenced.

For more information: <https://rm.coe.int/prems-122418-gbr-2574-brochure-questions-istanbul-convention-web-16x16/16808f0b80?fbclid=IwAR1dAF6D5rL7INqllleWbxsP92t9ZH-uh-ovv2359KoffOB-OAmAYs2ImKSw>

It impacts women everywhere, at any time. It is very costly: it has been estimated at 44 billion per country, 16 billion for the European Union alone. Breaking the silence and taboos that keep it going is key, shifting the shaming of women victim to the perpetrator is essential. VAW goes hand in hand with discrimination; confronting one is tackling the other.

Likewise, perpetuating discriminatory stereotypes can be a starting point in stopping gender-based violence. The WFD 2018 made a priority in discussing this issue and welcoming

several initiatives that help to tackle and prevent VAW, and protect its victims all around the world.

### How can the law help?

The importance and success of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) has been recognised and highlighted many times during the WFD's various sessions. **Feride Acar**, President of the Istanbul Convention, present during the Plenary Session "Violence Against Women, Sexism and Discrimination" reminded the participants of its influence in combating VAW. It contains efficient measures to prevent VAW and protect survivors, as well as to prosecute the perpetrators, in a coordinated way, as gender-based violence knows no borders. Victim of sexual violence herself, the Japanese Journalist **Shiori Ito's** story was a striking example of the globalisation of this phenomenon: she denounced the lack of **support measures, of accountability /impunity for perpetrators**, the presence of **social stigma** towards the victims (as she had to claim asylum in London herself) and the **insufficiency of the legal and judicial systems** (burglary had a harsher sentence than rape).

But before being able to use legislation or to reach out, it is important to offer platforms for women to talk. Initiatives such as **Get Heard in Morocco** or **FIDA in Kenya** face these problems daily. For both of them it is about introducing and connecting women and girls to laws and regulations that can help them protect themselves. **FIDA**, winner of the 2018 Democracy Innovation Award goes even further, they train women on how to dress and speak in court, to represent themselves rather than depend purely on predominantly male layers in Kenya who can often have gender-based bias. These striking examples show that a judiciary system has to work with the population and the civil society as they are not

strong enough to break traditional norms on their own.

## Sexism in political institutions



Violence against women impacts their participation in politics directly. Indeed, sexist remarks, misogyny and overall violence in political institutions as well as in politics in general refrains them from fully taking part in our democracies. Parliamentarians, assistants and campaigners suffer from a wide range of violence (psychological, sexual harassment, sexist remarks, and violent behaviours). The **Inter-Parliamentary Union** and the **Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe** have launched a joint survey assessing harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe. The study highlighted psychological violence with 85% of respondents having experienced it. Stereotypes and online sexist attacks are both following for over the majority of respondents. Furthermore, it revealed the bigger issue: various forms of violence against women can prevent women from pursuing their mandate; or even from speaking about the violence they suffer.

This phenomenon has been corroborated by the consultations held by the **Young Women's Leadership Network** in Canada: 80% of women who experience sexual violence or harassment leave politics. To try and fix this, the NGO provides support to the victims. Giving

opportunities to speak out loud and to have appropriate forums to thrive is crucial to women's effective participation in political processes. Enforcing disciplinary sanctions and creating independent mechanisms to help women achieve this and ensuring that parliamentary immunity does not stop legal actions for sexual harassment will lead the path towards a less violent environment.

The **Justice for All** initiative from Syria gave an example of this "appropriate forum to thrive". In a context of vulnerable position (conflicts) the NGO offered a place for women to discuss and reflect on the adoption of transitional justice programs in Syria. This ensures that, in a time of heavy violence, they can fight for women's rights in these transitional mechanisms and they are not forgotten after the wars.

Providing platforms for reporting gender-based violence is not enough. It needs to be accompanied with education, trainings on what discrimination and harassment are in the workplace as well as in everyday life. Only then changes can start to occur.



### « Building Sustainable Peace: The Importance of Women's Inclusion »

The Community of Democracies hosted a panel discussion on the role of women in peace building and peace processes. The conversation was built around the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Women experts in the field provided specific lessons learned and best practices for advancing women's participation in sustaining peace from Syria, the Balkans, Central Africa and South America. Main issues highlighted included: ensuring meaningful participation of women and inclusive decision-making at the national, regional and global levels; the nexus between democracy and security; the role of just and strong institutions for sustaining peace.

The satellite event was conducted in the framework of a newly-launched "Engaging Women in Sustainable Peace (EWSP)" project and kindly funded by the Republic of Korea. The project seeks to contribute to international debate on women in the peace and security dialogue by inferring consolidated best practices from case studies.

## Sexual harassment in the public space...

Tackling the issues of sexual harassment (both physical and verbal) has also been at the forefront of the 2018 WFD. Two ways have been identified to fix it: legislative measures and civil society's advocacy. The correlation between law and activism is key as they reinforce each other.

**The Hollaback! Jakarta** initiative is an online tool that provides a safe platform for users to report act of harassments on a map. It also allows women to share their experience and thus contributes in breaking the silence and taboos. By using the community, the initiative prevents crimes and provides a safe map for women to freely use.

Two other initiatives made use of hobbies and trivial activities to promote gender equality and to prevent sexual harassment. Indeed, **Yalla Let's Bike from Syria** organises bike rallies in a country where norms and culture prevents women to both freely move and ride bikes. Its aim is to deconstruct traditional norms. Furthermore, being part of the group in itself prevents forms of harassment. Likewise, **Shooting Touch** works through sports to empower women in rural areas of Rwanda. Through games of basketball, they engage with youth and women on topics such as citizenship, democracy, health or empowerment. They provide with HIV and malaria testing, trainings for jobs... Through this, they also work in integrating men into the picture and discuss the issues of violence and traditional gender norms directly with them. Moreover, as gender equality policies in Rwanda only truly exist in the capital city Kagali, **Shooting Touch** works in raising awareness in the countryside.



The collaboration between Ososphère and the Council of Europe continued during the WFD 2018 with a workshop aiming to create a radio and urban programme with Radio en Construction and the band "Converson" with direct involvement of WFD participants.

Through architects and experts of the public space the workshop was a continuously changing construction designed to allow for debates around the topic of Gender Equality.

For more information:

<http://www.radioenconstruction.com/index.php?post/2018/11/19/Chorus.radio/-Forum-Mondial-de-la-D%C3%A9mocratie-2018>

## ...and in the cyberspace

Violence against women is not only present in the public space, workplace and institutions, but has a foothold in the cyberspace as well, where traditional barriers and extremist behaviours often emerge through the mask of anonymity and the cover of distance. This was one of the key issues for this year's WFD as the cyberspace offers for many protection, prevention, and more importantly a place to exchange and share stories. #MeToo and similar forms of sharing have emerged and allowed for Gender Equality to be at the forefront of political agendas. The need to regulate the cyberspace is growing increasingly as it can both be the best tool to fight for gender equality as well as one of the worst tools to perpetuate forms of harassment and hate speech.

The **#HerNetHerRights** by the European Women's Lobby works to fight against Online VAW. The first part aimed at analysing data in order to create a more inclusive and safer cyber realm for all women and girls. The project also helped and supported female candidates in the European Elections through providing training to prevent and deal with women politicians being targeted online.

## Fighting trafficking



"Trafficking in human beings" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs."

For more information :  
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/090000168008371d>

and girls. It happens more often than not for sexual exploitation., Statistically, there are more women that are underprivileged and less educated than men, therefore they are more at risk of falling in the nets of trafficking networks. It needs to be prevented, both by governments and civil society alike. But it also means finding ways to help and empower the survivors to ensure they can go back to society and thrive. It raises the very simple matter of women owning their bodies.

The tribune **KBTask** gave an example of cross-border cooperation between France and Germany on issues of sex-work. Whilst the two countries have very different legislations its aim is to gather data and good practices, often lacking in that department. Likewise, **the Red Tra Sex** initiative gathers sex workers and former sex workers from 14 Latin American and Caribbean countries. Whilst sex work here is not condemned, this initiative fights for dignity, basic rights and healthcare for its members.

The **Bagel Bejgl** initiative provided with an example of a social enterprise used to empower and help victims of trafficking reconnect with society and build a future. Through the selling of Bagels in Serbia, they help girls to work and forget their past whilst restoring their self-confidence and control over their bodies.



The lab 13: **Women's diversity: what are the interests of women of ethnic minorities and who represents them?** made use of the innovative LEGO® SERIOS PLAY® method to explore the unconscious assumptions that influence the behaviour of men and women by identifying those **cultural norms and practices** as well as institutional, structural and legal barriers that hinder equal political participation of women of ethnic minority backgrounds, including from Roma and Traveller communities.

## 2. Leadership and power relations: setting the tone

VAW is the core issue for all gender equality related debates. But even when reaching the heights of the pyramid, inequalities last. Indeed, whilst progress has been made during the past century, it seems to have stopped in the last few years. **The Time for Facts** session showed some striking figures: 70% of countries in the world have seen no improvement in their Gender Equality scores. Less than 30% of national parliaments' members are women. And there are only 21% of women in cabinet worldwide.

Initiatives and discussants alike have raised these issues and addressed the importance of having women in leadership positions, whether economic or political. Fighting for equal representation, dealing with glass ceilings, working along with the education and judiciary system to balance representation are the ways to set the example. The discussions focused on reflections on elections and democratic participation, on ways to involve political parties in parity issues, on breaking gender gap in the economy and on better use of the local level politics to include women.



Salles



## Women in democracy

As of today, whilst progress is being made, several structural barriers hinder women from running in elections. Some have been discussed previously (psychological pressure, violence...). Some have not: economic inequalities, political tradition and networks, education and traditions... Fighting these obstacles requires the use of micro-activism, of local engagement, trainings, and grass-root level democratic processes to reconnect with the populations...

An example of non-legal barrier preventing women from partaking in democracy is the family vote, as demonstrated by the initiative **Life VOTE Mascote** from Albania. Indeed, in Albania (and more specifically rural areas), women are excluded from decision-making processes and voting. These duties impound by tradition on men. In order to capture the attention of the public this initiative uses animators dressed up as mascots who raise awareness in local places (bazar, markets...) and answer questions.

Another barrier is education, property ownership, and overall pays inequality that leads to women being under confident and unable to participate in democracies. The initiative **Women Democratic Leaders** from **CASA** in India fights for economical empowerment of women. Through the local self-governance system in rural areas (Panchayat Raj System) they help women to take part in daily decision processes. *“Having control in local self-government means having control over their own lives”*.



### “Gender Inequality and E-Democracy”

Munster Satellite Event

The satellite event for the WFD by the *Institute for Political Science Münster* focused on electronic democracy, gender equality and participation in the digital society. Academic experts from the University of Münster, practitioners from Liquid Democracy and Kiron and students discussed challenges, best practices and participatory online instruments.

Key questions addressing current problems included “Is the digital divide related to gender?”, “Is digitization reinforcing gender inequality?” An outlook into the future was taken by discussing solutions along the questions “What kind of digital innovations mitigate gender inequality?” “How can women develop competencies regarding social media, data security, big data & online participation?” “How can more women accede to position of influence in the field of digitization such as CEO or coders?” Together with *Marie-Kathrin Siemer (Liquid Democracy)*, *Heba Ledwon (Kiron)* and *Prof. Norbert Kersting (University of Münster)* ongoing issues of gender inequality in e-democracy were identified and current measures as well as future solutions discussed.

## Gender gap in economy

Another issue that prevents women from reaching leadership position is deeply rooted in professional and economic inequalities. Shifting the status quo in the economic world is necessary for gender equality to progress. This means getting rid of several old-fashioned approaches of merit and quality, as they suppose that everyone is equal in the first hand. Breaking the barriers hindering women in professional life is essential. Because if the gender gap was closed, positive effects would arise: the Eurozone could grow by 13% for example, creativity would thrive and systems in lack of novelty would get new minds and ways of thinking that can help them thrive. And indirectly, it would involve women in democracies, in politics, in structural change, fundamental in a time of growing disconnect between the populations and their leaders.

One way to break these barriers was through the very classic use of quotas. **Talent naar de Top** works in the Netherlands. They ask companies to sign their Charter and to uphold to it. That means improving the representation of women on top positions, training sessions and coaching on gender-related issues. Through education and training they managed to help their members reach an average rate of women in high position of 27% within the companies that signed the Charter, against 6% for the top 100 companies worldwide.

The **Cercles InterElles** offers another way to support women's inclusion in the science and technology sector. They created a network to help women to progress within a massively dominated male environment. The members of the network (men and women alike) are invited to discuss issues from their companies and develop ways and concrete proposals to help women achieve Gender Equality. By mixing skills work and network building, this initiative manages to break through barriers.



Lastly, **Fearless Futures** offers a very different approach through workshop deconstructing classical issues: sexism, racism, stereotypes, gender... The goal here is for the discussants to understand their own complicity in stereotyping and to learn to think differently. It aims at getting rid of stereotypes within businesses and allowing for women to progress.

## Political parties

As gatekeepers to women's participation in higher level of politics, political parties have been under great scrutiny during the WFD.

They need to set the example and work on internal procedures and mechanisms that ensure equal representation between men and women. This is the key for improving women's effective participation in the political arena, as well as in public life generally. Whilst change can come from the bottom, setting examples in leadership position and policy making, thus working from the top is essential.

First of all, in order to foster change, analysis and self-reflexion is needed. To that very end, the **OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)** has developed a **Gender Audit for political parties**. That tool is designed to allow parties to "self-assess". From their internal processes, structures and activities they can look with a gender perspective to identify and eradicate discriminatory practices and find ways for improving women's participation as well as gender equality party policies. So far, they have audited 35 political parties in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and allowed for 28 gender action plans to be founded. Its only limit is the necessity for the parties to be willing to change and reach out to them on gender related issues.

Awareness on gender issues and the distance between politics and citizens are the root cause to many problems when it comes to achieving gender equality and holding higher ups accountable on these topics. **Economia Feminista** has developed an online tool, the **FeminIndex** whose job is to interrogate Congress members and candidates on gender related agenda: LGBTQ rights, economics, reproductive rights... and rank them on how 'feminist' they appear. With over 60 responses from Congress people and candidates, they were able to ensure that the vote from the population was done in full disclosure and that



citizens could directly engage with their representatives.

Finally it is essential to sometimes reflect outside of the traditional party concept. **Volt Europa** is a pan-European movement active in 32 European countries with 15 000 members across 300 cities. Its goal is to take part in all elections at all level. They plan to tackle discrimination, not solely on men and women, but also on LGBTIQ+ individuals. For them, change has to come from people in position of power, and they thus support positive discrimination.



### Participatory Democracy: can it help?

Citizen participation has been an important topic for the WFD since its first edition: with both the work of its Incubator for Participatory Democracy and the aim to progressive and innovative traditional democratic governance. Participatory tools can allow women to participate better, to be empowered.



#### "New forms of participation in local democracy" Geneva Satellite Event

The Albert Hirschman Centre on Democracy at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies has been actively involved in the "Democracy Week" that is promoted every year by the Geneva Chancellery of State around the international day on democracy. This year it organised a series of [debates](#) to discuss recent shifts in spaces for participation, in particular at the local level and in favour of indigenous populations. The thematic workshops focused on new models of democratic participation based on concrete examples. They involved representatives of political institutions, civil society, students and citizens from the Geneva Canton. **Virginio Merola**, the Mayor of Bologna, also took part in these workshops. On 4 October, the four women invited to the panel entitled "The new wave of populism in the Americas : advance or setback for indigenous communities?", **Ruth Betsaida Itamari Choque**, Member of the Bolivian Parliament, **Ethel Branch**, Attorney General of the Navajo Nation, **Nancy Postero**, Professor of Anthropology and co-Director, International Institute, UC San Diego, and **Karmen Ramírez Boscán**, Founder of Wayunkerra Indigenous Women's Initiative, reflected on how democratic engagement can promote indigenous rights. They discussed different experiences and challenges, from North America to Latin America.

**The Democratic Society** presented an initiative aiming at interconnected activities with seed participation in the communities across Messina: **Le Agora di Messina**. Whilst this type of programme is fairly common nowadays, this one has the particularity to develop inclusive approaches from the beginning. This means including women, young people and "excluded" people in the very core of the project, in order for them to be empowered and involved directly in the planning.

In the same vein, the **City of Ghent** has seen the creation of the **Univers'elle** organisation. Starting from simple 'tea-afternoons' discussions, the group now meets regularly to debate on issues of sexual diversity, gender identity, participation and women

empowerment. Both these initiatives allow for something very simple, that was often missing: it allows women to have a voice.

### 3. Campaigning and awareness raising for women's rights

The ways to raise awareness on women's rights has been an underlying subtheme during the whole Forum.

As stated in the **Time for Fact**, gender mainstreaming at the European level is extremely difficult. It is even harder if we expand worldwide as the difficulties of translating and conveying theories get more complicated. Language complexity is highly present here, and it is multiplied by cultural and social differences, making the question of campaigning and reaching out globally for women's rights and Gender Equality at the forefront of this year's Forum.

#MeToo managed to touch the world, can it be duplicated? What tools are essential in campaigning nowadays? The answers highlighted the need for a mix between modern communication and a more old-fashioned one. Reaching out online, through websites or diverse applications is essential, but it needs to be accompanied by face to face explanations and support.

**The Strajk kobiet (Polish Women's Strike)** gave an example of a countrywide success story in Poland. Whilst the protest started as a pro-abortion movement it quickly evolved into a wider phenomenon. From women's rights to democracy, free media, pro-EU and human's rights, it now delves on many topics. Its particularity relies on the involvement of traditional activists from small towns or villages. They are in charge of setting the agenda and organising events. By delegating the thematic of campaigns to those really concerned, this initiative is able to reach out directly to everyone and is praised for its inclusiveness.

Similarly, the **ABAAD – Resource Centre for Gender Equality** in Lebanon presented inclusive ways of campaigning. Their fights are mainly against rape related issues: from the abolition of the Article 522 of the Lebanese Penal Code (exonerating rapists who marry their victims) to more general campaigning. They managed to abolish that article through "A White Dress Does Not Cover the Rape": dressing in white dresses with blood seeping from it. They managed to involve men, and most importantly to raise awareness to an unknown facet of the Lebanese penal code.

For these two initiatives as well as for the **Enough Campaign** from **Oxfam** (against violence against women and girls) social norm changes can only be achieved when ordinary people have the power to drive said change. Societies need to be involved directly for it to last and to tackle deeply rooted patterns. NGO's ought to work together as collaboration is essential, especially regarding funding.

#### The influence of media

Language, stereotypes and education appeared at the centre of most debates during the WFD. They are inherent to discrimination against women and have been integrated in our culture and traditions. As a mirror of society, the media set the standards. Thus, it is certainly important to take a deeper look at what arose. Can we get rid of gender stereotypes in the media? How?



"Gender stereotypes are preconceived social and cultural patterns or ideas whereby women and men are assigned characteristics and roles determined and limited by their sex. Gender stereotyping presents a serious obstacle to the achievement of real gender equality and feeds into gender discrimination."

For more information:

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/gender-stereotypes-and-sexism> )

In the struggle to fight against gender-based stereotypes in the media, the WFD witnessed several approaches. The first one, from the French NGO **Chiennes de garde** was a monitoring initiative in TV shows, art production and advertising. It reports and denounces abuses and files complaint directly towards the authorities. France has at its disposal a wide legal framework with regards to discrimination and prejudices. But they are often too broad and no body or institution is directly dedicated to sexism in the media. Hence **Chiennes de garde** fight for a better legal framework. Similarly, in Ukraine, the initiative **Ukraine without sexism** fights sexist content in advertising. They also work mainly through monitoring and complaints but with the involvement of citizens through their website. Citizens can screenshot and send discriminatory or sexist content to the association who will then forward them towards the competent authorities. Whilst they work hard, the reality remains complex: from 500 complaints filed, only 30 were regarded as sexist.

Several female journalists gave their views on the topic as well. For **Laila MALIK**, Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) from Canada, there is hope for a more "feminist journalism" since the wake of #MeToo. Examples of this are the famous Gender Equality section of The New York Times or The Guardian. **Lidia KURASINSKA**, a freelance journalist from Poland whose work focuses mainly on the Balkans and Eastern Europe denounced the normalisation of violence against women through the media and their link to political actors. There is a need to support, financially and intellectually, feminist media. **Maria SANZ DOMINGUEZ**, openDemocracy 50.50 women's rights & economic justice fellow from Paraguay denounced the laughter and discrimination journalists get when discussing topics such as LGBTI. Like her colleague from Poland, she fights for a better financing of feminist media and topics. On the other end of the compass, **Claudia TORRISI**, freelance journalist and openDemocracy 50.50 columnist

from Italy offered some thought provoking information as she believes there is no feminist media today. The media are too technical on topics such as LGBTIQ, abortion and too far from the populations. Creating this "feminist journalist" goes hand in hand with cultural changes and educational ones.

The realm of moviemaking was explored as well. During the roundtable **Do more films by women mean more women's films?** female speakers from the movie world denounced the difficulties they face. Blockbuster movies are almost always directed by a man and supported by a masculine cast. This creates a background where women see society through the eyes of men and multiplies the power inequalities and discrimination underlying in our societies. To fight this, public institutions responsible for movie financing need to work on quotas in the gender distribution of film. Erasing inequalities from the private sector (big movies) is harder and like most topics debated goes through awareness raising and educational changes. Combating unconscious bias in decision-making (whether to select the cast, the director, the funding, the theme...) should be done through training sessions and acknowledgment.

### **Involving men in the battle.**

Men are still on top of social hierarchies, taking advantage of privileges they enjoy over women. This phenomenon is heavily unconscious as tradition, setting, culture, and ideas foster it. Men, and masculinity in its broadest sense, whilst different from country to country, involves strength, assertion, decisiveness. However, as much as women are essential to democracy, men are central to fight for Gender Equality. The question of this involvement has been present in every debate during the WFD. How to involve men in the fight for Gender Equality? How to engage them in preventing and eradicating gender based violence? How to fight against patriarchal norms?

In India, the **Man Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA)** association fights against violence since 1993 by including men. In India –as in most places -masculinity is deeply rooted in traditions and in religion. The initiative selects men aged from 18 to 20, from varied backgrounds and teaches them to deconstruct masculinity and to reflect on their views about it. This goes through workshops, exercises, street theatre... It also includes communication skills as the objective is for these selected beacons to transmit and pass on the message to help preventing gender-based violence.

In the United Kingdom, **White Ribbon** believes that *“men need to challenge other men”*. This initiative is all about awareness raising. It creates “change agents” with its accreditation, a

white ribbon that men wear in order to raise awareness. By working with city councils, police forces, fire services or universities, they reach out in domains where masculinity is often very present.

But these initiatives emphasised the very limits of this involvement: men often reject the idea that they are privileged and there appear to be no sense of urgency in men changing. Education was once again brought up as the key factor in fostering change, whether at home, at school, or at work.

# Lab 1 – What if she runs? Better representation through higher female participation in elections

*Sponsored by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Région Grand Est*

**Moderator:**

**Ms Christopher YVON**, Ambassador, UK Permanent Representative to the Council of Europe

**Initiatives:**

**Life VOTE Mascote (Albania)** by **Ms Françeska MUÇO**

**Church's Auxiliary for Social Action, CASA (India)** by **Ms Joycia THORAT**

**Discussants:**

**Ms Aicha AYARI**, Project Coordinator of the program "Women Leaders of Tomorrow" for the Middle East and North Africa region and Euromed of the Belgian association AIM - Actions in the Mediterranean

**Ms Sylvia CLEFF LE DIVELLEC**, Attorney at Law at the Paris Bar, France/Germany

**Ms Dusica DAVIDOVIC**, Member of the delegation of Serbia to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

**Ms Bryony RUDKIN**, Member of the delegation of the United Kingdom of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

## The lab in brief

Quotas have been established around the world to ensure that women candidates can run in elections. What is the right design? What are the structural barriers that hinder women from running in elections? How can we fight against these barriers? Does gender parity in terms of positions mean women have 50% of power?

This LAB discussed the structural barriers that hinder women from running in elections. Among the tools that can be used to fight against these barriers, the LAB stressed the importance of micro-activism, including local engagement, grass-root level democratic process and training for elected local leaders.

## About the initiatives

### Life VOTE Mascote

Today, patriarchal culture in Albanian society still restricts women's ability to vote. Especially in rural areas, women are excluded from decision-making within the family, which is solely reserved for men by tradition. That is why young women in rural areas do often pass on their electoral documents to their father, who fills it in on their behalf. Family voting is ingrained in family tradition, hindering women's influence on the political scene.

To draw attention to the problem, animators from ACT for Society Centre dress up as mascots and engage the community in one of the most traditional gathering places – the 'bazar', weekly local markets. The use of masks on the mascots' heads carries out a dual function: it catches the attention of the population of those areas, where the mask attracts curiosity and questions, while at the same time allowing a friendly approach. The volunteers also organise simulations where the community is invited to vote in a symbolic box, challenging the idea that the ability to vote is traditionally reserved to men. This particular project reached in total more than 18.000 Albanians, addressing the lack of awareness about the importance of decision-making: one person, one vote. Because voting is not a family affair.

## **Women Democratic Leaders, CASA**

In rural India, women are often excluded from political decision-making, especially when they belong to the lower 'caste' still in place in the Indian society. This makes it for them extremely difficult to raise their voices and to show their competences to handle daily challenges in society.

Therefore, the initiative by the Church Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA) aims to encourage women to participate in the local self-governance system (the so-called "Panchayat Raj System"), by including them in daily decision processes. CASA's projects cover three objectives: increasing women's power in politics, in the economy – with a focus on women's contributions in the agricultural sector – and lastly, to combat violence against women. Participants are also trained on humanitarian assistance and disaster preparedness. Throughout social empowerment, leadership trainings and access to education, CASA's approach is holistic and inclusive. Women form self-help groups supporting each other, and they assume the responsibility to take care of the others around them. No political and social transformation can take place without recognising that democracy is not only about rights, but also about responsibility.

### **What happened?**

*"The love of democracy is that of equality", The Spirit of the Laws, Montesquieu.*

## **Fighting non-legal barriers preventing women to exercising their political rights**

Although nowadays women are legally granted the right to vote in all countries, there are still some non-legal barriers that prevent the equality in exercising their political rights. A clear example is Albania's patriarchal culture as it still restricts women's ability to vote, participate in electoral meetings and policy making, consequently hindering their influence on the political scene. Especially in rural areas, young women often pass on their electoral documents to their fathers or husbands. The latter can also deeply influence their vote. This profoundly ingrained phenomenon is known as 'family voting'. According to a widespread definition there are several types of family voting, which mainly occurs when a male family member accompanies female relatives into the polling booth, or votes on their behalf. By accentuating that family voting is a violation of both, electoral rights and women's equality, Ms Françeska MUÇO pointed out that the Act for Society Centre's project aims at raising public awareness and promoting the eradication of secret vote violation, on the one hand, and women's participation to political life, on the other hand.

## **Prevent exclusion from political decision-making.**

Women are often excluded from political decision-making. In rural areas of India for example, literacy rate, property ownership, political representation and women-led households are very low. About 66% of women's work is unpaid and women are significantly less politically, economically and socially empowered. This makes it extremely difficult for them to raise their voices and to show their competences to handle daily challenges in society. Also here, NGOs and civil society fill the gap left open by the government. The Church Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA) targets vulnerable and marginalised communities, making the project genuinely inclusive. It also aims at encouraging women to participate in the local self-governance system by including them in daily decision-making processes. As Ms Joycia THORAT explained, most of the women they work with have never been out of their village. The project involves women who spend most of their time in the house and gives them the tools to become political representatives and advocates for change. Through a process of 'conscientisation' and capacity building to enhance social engagement, an increasingly high number of women is not only able to vote, but also to contest elections and participate in local governance meetings, transforming from background actors

to main actors of change. For women in rural areas, having control in local self-government means having control in their own life. This goes through increasing women's power in politics, in the economy and combating violence against women. It is vital to ensure women's rights to life, dignity in the first place and only after that to equity. No political and social transformation can take place without recognising that democracy is not only about rights, but also about responsibility.

Both initiatives have been well received by the audience and raised several comments and questions. Ms Aicha AYARI seemed concerned about the possible reverse effects of both actions on the field. Regarding the first initiative, she asked about their impact assessment and communication strategies. She also wondered to what extent an activity that lasts a few hours can have an impact on beliefs that are deeply embedded in society. On this subject, Ms MUÇO acknowledged that their aim is not to change the Albanian society in a few hours, but rather to raise awareness and disseminate a message. Some of those messages are disseminated by the mascots as slogans: 'respect your right to vote freely', 'separate your vote but not your family' and so on; while roundtables after the campaign constitute part of their impact assessment. Ms Sylvia CLEFF LE DIVELLEC recounted her experience at the last Trilateral Congress, explaining how also in France, Germany and Switzerland there are growing concerns about women participation in politics and unconscious biases. Ms Dusica DAVIDOVIC recalled the Nineties, when she was already working with her party in Serbia and most women seemed afraid to vote by themselves. To address this issue, they organised several roundtables, but not a single woman showed up. Ms DAVIDOVIC considered that gender equality is the main criteria for establishing a successful democratic society. By asking clarifications on the targeted areas and public, Ms Bryony RUDKIN pointed out two of the biggest challenges that the project faces. As Ms MUÇO considered, the initiative is not always well received by the young men that ACT for Society Centre tries to involve in the debate. Furthermore, they intend to extend the initiative to other rural areas, although they are lacking support from political parties. As Ms DAVIDOVIC and other people in the audience, also Ms Daniela GIANNONI, member of the delegation of San Marino to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, described the family voting as a widespread phenomenon. During her last electoral observation mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, she was often told that the women who were going inside the voting booth with 'assistants' had some 'eyesight problems'. Ms GIANNONI underlined the importance of international organisations in raising awareness about this abuse, and fostering a cultural change of tradition. Mr Stewart DICKSON, member of the delegation of the United Kingdom to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, agreed with Ms GIANNONI, adding that campaigns to discourage family voting are needed everywhere, even in the Netherlands.

To Ms AYARI's question on the 'Church' component of CASA's name and organisation, Ms THORAT explained that CASA is a space for all vulnerable groups to come together, and their approach is secular to the point that most of the people they help do not know that it is a Christian organisation. To a similar question from the audience about how do they deal with people who have no religion, Ms THORAT replied that humanity is their only religion. Then, she added that they do not take religion into account: their priority is development. To Bryony RUDKIN's question on why they only targeted rural areas, Ms THORAT replied that this is the result of a conscious decision. They operate in non-mainstream areas, where there are no facilities such as electricity, which are not NGOs' favourite places and sometimes not even under government officials' reach.

Both, the panel and the audience agreed on the importance of creating better and equal opportunities for women to participate in political life. However, as the challenges are not uniform around the world, there is no one-size-fits-all approach: it depends on the experience and the knowledge of how particular traditions and values are settled into communities.

## Conclusion

- ✓ Fund and support women not only in electoral campaigning but also after they have successfully won a mandate
- ✓ It is important that international organisations work hand in hand with NGO's in raising awareness about abuses, and fostering a cultural change of tradition
- ✓ Create better and equal opportunities for women to participate in political life



## Lab 2 – No pressure! How can political parties make parity a priority?

*Sponsored by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)*

### **Moderator:**

**Ms Rósa BJÖRK BRYNJÓLFSDÓTTIR**, member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, Iceland

### **Initiatives:**

**Gender Audits for political parties (ODIHR)** by **Ms Tiina KUKKAMAA-BAH**

**Bridging the gender gap by 2025 (VOLT Europa)** by **Ms Colombe CAHEN-SALVADOR** and **Ms Zuzana STRUHAROVA**

**FeminIndex: Measuring Gender Issues in the Public Agenda, Economía Femini(s)ta (Argentina)** by **Ms Mercedes D'ALESSANDRO**

### **Discussants:**

**Ms Tània VERGE MESTRE**, Associate Professor, Departament de Ciències Polítiques i Socials, Barcelona, Spain

### **The lab in brief**

Gender equality in political parties should be a priority for them, since they are the gatekeepers to women's participation in politics and democracy, and hence to equal participation in public life in general. Political parties must therefore lead by example, in both their internal procedures and mechanisms, and the policies which they advocate for in their manifestos and, ultimately, in legislation. Political parties should ensure that women are well represented within the party, and that those people in positions of power - both within the party and within the State - have an outlook and set of policies which support women in their effective participation in public life, as well as economically, socially, and on health issues.

Changes in the representation of women at all levels of society have to come from the State, from leaders, and thus the focus of the lab was very much on the model of the traditional political party. Each initiative presented in the lab, in one way or another, attempted to make this change, whether that was bottom-up, creating a new party to place representatives who support gender equality in positions of power; top-down, working with the leadership of parties to make their internal processes more transparent when it comes to their treatment and representation of women internally; and to visualise the voting patterns and views of candidates in Congressional elections to enable citizens to engage with their representatives on gender equality issues. All of these initiatives insisted that the situation of women within society and, more specifically, within political parties, will not improve itself of its own volition.

### **About the initiatives**

#### **Gender Audits for political parties (ODIHR)**

Women's persistent under-representation is not only an issue of women's rights or social justice, but a serious challenge to democratic policy making, legitimacy and quality of democratic institutions, and broader civic engagement. While many countries focus on legislative measures to achieve women's representation in political and public life, such as legal quotas and allocation of public funding to parties that support women's candidacy, insufficient attention has been paid to the role political parties themselves play in facilitating or hindering women's access to politics, even when political parties are considered as 'gate-keepers' to political participation, when it comes to political participation of women.

ODIHR developed the political party gender audit methodology, or “self-assessment”, in order to assess internal political party processes, structures, and activities from a gender perspective, with the aim of identifying discriminatory practices and recommending ways for advancing women’s political participation and gender equal party policies.

The action plan should contain concrete measures on how the leadership of the political party in question will take on the findings. The implementation of the plan should then be monitored, and it is recommended that a concrete monitoring plan is included in the action plan itself. They may suggest that an annual report at a party congress is given, for example, or that national women’s organisations engage with the process to monitor the implementation externally. So far the impact has been to audit 35 political parties in eastern Europe/Central Asia, and 400 recommendations have been made, serving as the foundation to 28 gender action plans. The presenter underlined that this is a long-term commitment by the parties to create change, and that commitment and flexibility is important in making the most of this audit and action plan. The initiative should increase transparency and integrity within and of political parties as a first step, and it is most positive where leaders are willing to identify shortcomings in their own party. Ms Tània VERGE MESTRE, *discussant*, asked whether the implementation of an action plan would depend on a ‘women’s wing’ of a given political party - but it was answered that this audit can only be carried out, since it will only be effective, when the leadership of the party are signed up to its aims and its practice.

### **Bridging the gender gap by 2025**

Volt Europa, a pan-European progressive movement was founded by young people after the referendum on Britain’s membership of the European Union, and is now active in 32 European countries with 15000 members across 300 cities and expanding. Volt Europa wants to take part in local, national, EU elections, the ambitions of all political parties. The pan-European model Volt has adopted did not hitherto exist, since the European system requires parties to be founded in each individual country separately. Volt thus worked within this system, overcoming this bureaucratic requirement, because, as young people, they found that they were not having their voices heard on a pan-European level.

Their policy plan is to tackle discrimination in the fields of the law, the workplace, the public sector and education, focusing not solely on men and women, but also on LGBTIQ+ individuals and on supporting these individuals into politics. They are of the view that change has to be achieved by people in positions of power, and so they support measures such as positive discrimination, candidate lists which alternate gender (to ensure that women are not placed at the bottom of such a candidate list), and mandatory reporting on gender balance and the gender pay gap. Volt hopes to push for this set of policies at every level of government (local, national, EU) to ensure that gender equality, amongst its other policies, is concretely implemented; everything they use in their policy plan is drawn from best practices from across the world.

Besides their policy programme, Volt wants to lead by example and not only push for external policies. They have a 50/50 executive quota within the party, and want to ensure inclusivity and diversity, particularly amongst policy makers (which come from members of the party). They wish to have mandatory training for leaders to make sure they know what discrimination is, and a conflict resolution body - so women and other groups can report harassment and discrimination. They believe these internal guidelines can be applied to other parties and NGOs. The presenters appealed to the audience to take steps to tackle gender inequality by setting targets, reporting on gender balance and the pay gap, and create separate reporting channels to deal with cases of discrimination and harassment.

## **FeminIndex: Measuring Gender Issues in the Public Agenda**

This initiative dealt not directly with the issue of getting women into positions of political power, but rather about ensuring that citizens (and of course that must include women) can see how representatives, regardless of gender, vote and feel about issues to do with gender equality. Economía Feminista therefore launched this initiative, the Feminindex, initially a survey to find what people thought of the gender agenda - i.e. LGBTQ rights, economics, reproductive rights, etc. Based on these responses, they formed visualisations of these results, in the form of cards with a 'traffic light' system. Bad responses received red lights on these cards, and good ones green, indicating how 'feminist' a given candidate is. It received more than 60 responses from Congresspeople and candidates, and based on this, feminists and supporters of women could see who to vote for who were supporters of a feminist agenda who could follow a feminist viewpoint.

The second step of Feminindex was during the abortion debate. They launched an open spread sheet in which they built the complete list of congressmen and women alongside their position on legal abortion. It engaged citizens - because people got involved - and it generated commitment from citizens not only politicians. Politicians started seeing what was important to voters. As Ms Tània VERGE MESTRE, *discussant*, succinctly put, this is a very useful information shortcut, allowing citizens to directly engage with their representatives on gender equality issues.

### **What happened?**

#### **A debate focused on quotas.**

Quota systems should form a key part of both internal procedures, guidelines and external policies. A quota system can be very effective in political parties to ensure that women are represented properly within parties, and have equally been proven to be effective in the wider public and private sectors. However, it has to be noted that quotas are only effective when they are monitored effectively, and when due consideration has been given to the method of implementation of a quota. Simply signing up to a quota system will not be sufficient to actually produce the required results; attention must be paid to the how.

Additionally, political parties should make quotas mandatory within their internal mechanisms and procedures, and should push to make them mandatory beyond their own systems, in the public and private sector. In response to questions about the notion that quotas can lead to a reduction in the quality of the workforce, it was affirmed that research shows an overall increase in quality when quotas are put in place. Strong support was thus given to putting in place mandatory 50/50 quotas, in order to both ensure the representation of women, and to improve the quality of the workforce.

## Conclusion

- ✓ Promote mandatory gender quotas in the public and private sectors, beyond the party system
- ✓ Gender equality in political parties should be a priority for them, since they are the gatekeepers to women's participation in politics and democracy, and hence to equal participation in public life in general
- ✓ Political parties lead by example on internal procedures and mechanism as well as policies and in legislation :
  - 1) Women should be well represented within the party
  - 2) There should be a set of policies which support women in their participation in public and economic life
  - 3) Quotas are key for these internal procedures to ensure that women are represented properly
- ✓ Introduce an annual report to assess progress toward gender equality within the party, to be presented and discussed at party convention

## Lab 3 – Is #MeToo the new model for women’s rights campaigns?

*Sponsored by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)*

**Moderator:**

**Ms Alexandra ADRIAENSSENS**, Project Director at the Directorate for Equal Opportunities in the Ministry of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and member of the Gender Equality Commission of the Council of Europe

**Initiatives:**

**Abolition of Article 522 on rape marriage, ABAAD (Lebanon)** by **Ms Aseel NAAMANI**  
**Strajk kobiet (Polish Women's Strike) (Poland)** by **Ms Marta LEMPART**  
**Enough Campaign, Oxfam, Global** by **Ms Faides TEMBA NSOFU**

**Discussants:**

**Ms Cécile GRÉBOVAL**, Programme Manager, Gender Equality Division, Council of Europe

### The lab in brief

This lab discussed what works when campaigning for women’s rights, how digital and offline tools can be combined to mobilise citizens and sensitise elected officials, and what language can be used to convince sceptics of gender equality.

### About the initiatives

#### Abolition of Article 522 on rape marriage

ABAAD had launched a national public awareness campaign during the 16 Days of Activism against Violence against Women called “A White Dress Does Not Cover the Rape” with the aim of having Article 522 of the Lebanese Penal Code repealed, which exonerated a rapist who married his victim. Only 1% of the Lebanese population had actually been aware of the existence of this provision in 2016. The campaign, which had been supported by the Minister for Women’s Affairs, had used the “white wedding dress”-allegory with blood seeping from it to change perceptions and social norms ahead of the vote in parliament in 2017. It had aimed at engaging men, including religious leaders and conservative blocs and MPs in parliament, as well as media figures and celebrities, and had worked through a network of supporters and influencers. While the Article had been repealed in a historic vote on 16 June 2017, the battle continued with a #ShameOnWho?-campaign around rape.

#### Strajk kobiet (Polish Women's Strike)

The Polish Women’s Strike campaign started out in 2016 as a rally to protest a bill which would have led to a total ban on abortion. The movement’s success story went beyond keeping the bill from passing, and had morphed into an inclusive and empowering grass-roots movement which fights for a “Poland for everyone”: women’s rights, democracy, a secular State, a free judiciary, a free media, remaining in the EU, and human rights (including for minorities). Its particularity was that it involved 90% of “ordinary” activists from smaller towns and villages, and let them decide locally on the subjects they wanted to work on and the events they wanted to organise. The campaign and the protesters were being attacked by the government and the police.

#### Enough Campaign

The “Enough” campaign is an Oxfam led campaign that has sparked a movement against violence towards women and girls, to address negative social norms in their specific contexts. It is situated in over 30 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and in the Pacific Area. The Enough

campaign aims to change widely accepted and harmful social norms that too often justify violence against women and girls to ones that promote gender equality and non-violence.

The campaign brings people of all genders, ages, and backgrounds together, to transform the normal. It works to challenge and make us reflect on one's behaviour, supports ordinary people to speak out against violence and present alternatives to harmful norms. Social media campaigns, art, music, workshops and positive aspirational messages encourage people to think and talk about harmful social norms and the potential damage they can do.

## What happened?

### **Necessity for huge mobilisation.**

The lab recalled the different type of mobilisation which had emerged around the Beijing Platform for Women's Rights in 1995. At the time, NGOs had believed that the key to success was a "virtual triangle" of NGOs, experts, and "femocrats" (feminist bureaucrats) that could drive legislative change. This is no longer the case: #MeToo had shown that it required a huge mobilisation to repel the backlash on women's rights. The "dark forces", which were not transparently financed, had the resources to react quickly – it did not seem sustainable that feminists had to mobilise all the time in response to attacks on women's rights, just to obtain a measure of damage control. What was needed now to drive legislative change? **Pure on-line mobilisation seemed insufficient: a combination of both old-fashioned real world protests such as demonstrations with new forms of mobilisation was needed; this required both committed persons within organisations, as well as funds, and reactions from everyone.**

The discussion with the audience which followed focused on how best to make things happen and how to keep up mobilisation, as well as on the scalability and replicability of the campaigns:

Marta LEMPART explained that it was easier to scale a movement when it was not limited to the capital of a country. The Polish Women's Strike campaign was 90% run by ordinary women in smaller and mid-size cities, and thus had been able to mobilise women who had never been interested in politics before to run in local elections. Aseel NAAMANI emphasised the importance of mobilising the community, not just engaging in political mobilisation. Faides Temba NSOFU explained how students who had graduated from the universities where they had been involved in campaigning were moving into positions of power and could thus affect real change, including legislative change, break the silence in the church community about violence against women, and change social norms in their own home communities.

Finally, answering a question on how to ensure NGOs can work together even if they are competing for funding, Faides Temba NSOFU explained how the "Enough" Campaign had been designed in a way that everyone could run with it without duplicating efforts. Marta LEMPART explained that the decentralised structure of the Polish Women's Strike campaign had advantages and disadvantages when it came to building local coalitions and avoiding competing for the same funding. Alexandra ADRIAENSSENS wrapped up the discussion by emphasising the importance of collaboration in any case.

## Conclusion

- ✓ Find an appropriate balance between traditional and modern ways of campaigning by using a mix of social media and new communication methods as well as field-centered campaigning, so as to raise awareness among the whole society by involving all of its actors
- ✓ Necessity to involve local levels and mid-sized countries (Polish Strike): communities are key
- ✓ Key importance of collaboration between NGO's and campaigns to prevent duplicating efforts and splitting of funds

## Lab 4 – Eradicating sexism and violence in political institutions: a matter of time or design?

*Sponsored by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)*

### **Moderator:**

**Ms Zita GURMAI**, member of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Hungary

### **Initiatives:**

**Addressing sexism, harassment and violence against women in Parliaments in Europe** (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe / Inter-Parliamentary Union) by **Ms Susan KIHKA**

**It's Time: Addressing Sexual Violence in Political Institutions, Young Women's Leadership Network (Canada)** by **Ms Arezoo NAJIBZADEH**

**Justice for All, Syrian Women's League (Syria)** by **Mr Sawsan ZAKZAK**

### **Discussant:**

**Ms Alice BARBIERI**, Gender Equality Rapporteur for the Youth Sector and member of the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe

### **The lab in brief**

Building strong, inclusive and democratic societies requires eradication of all abuse, harassment and assault against women. In the battle for women's empowerment it cannot be taken for granted that politically active women are free from any of the forms of gender-based violence. It is now long recognised that women are disproportionately targeted by abuse as a consequence of unequal power dynamics drawn from a long history of patriarchal domination. Breaking down prejudicial conceptions of women's role in society therefore is vital at a time when more women than ever before become parliamentarians (23% worldwide). Gender equality is therefore the means and the end to ending violence against women and encouraging more women to take their rightful place as leaders and decision-makers.

Nevertheless gender-based violence is widespread in public life. Parliamentarians, assistants and campaigners all suffer from different forms of violence ranging from psychological violence, including threats of death, rape or beatings, to actual sexual harassment, physically violent behavior and very often sexist remarks. To counter this, more available data contributes to better national response to violence against women in political institutions, while the #MeToo movement has been instrumental in breaking the obsolete culture of silence.

The debate explored what happens after #MeToo. How can we 'by design' move from this culture of silence to a culture where every act of violence is condemned? What are the ways to ensure concrete long-term changes that give all politicians, regardless of gender, the appropriate forum to thrive?

### **About the initiatives**

#### **Sexism, harassment, and violence against women in parliaments in Europe (IPU-PACE)**

The IPU and PACE have carried out a joint survey on sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe. The study shows the prevalence of violence among politicians, institutional responses when violence is reported and the particular impact on women's democratic participation.



The most widespread form of violence was psychological violence with 85% of the respondents having experienced it in their term of office. The gender aspect of the particular attacks is clear: over 50% of the respondents have been the subject of online sexist attacks on social networks, while 67.9% have heard comments relating to their physical appearance or based on gender stereotypes.

The study also found that women parliamentarians and assistants felt distraught, isolation and neglect, as well as anger after having been the subjects of racist conduct. Despite this the majority of women (79.2%) expressed their determination to pursue their parliamentary mission, while only 52.9% wished to speak openly about the problem.

The high rate of underreporting has been connected to political party loyalty and oppressive perceptions of women who speak up as weak. As a result of institutional acceptance that condones such behaviour, there is a failure to acknowledge the systematic nature of gender-based violence in parliament and therefore limited support for the creation of effective complaints mechanisms.

In view of these findings, the report suggests several good practices. Enforcement of sanctions, availability of assistance for women survivors, and the establishment of an independent complaints mechanism are some of the measures that address the systemic culture of violence. Long-term, sustainable impact will only be fostered by awareness-raising initiatives that promote a gender-sensitive culture in Parliament and policies which guarantee the safety of women and men on an equal level.

#### **It's Time: Addressing Sexual Violence in Political Institutions, Young Women's Leadership Network (Canada)**

The Young Women's Leadership Network is a non-profit organisation dedicated to fostering young women's democratic engagement in a twofold manner. The organisation supports women in political institutions and advocates for appropriate conditions that allow a working process free of harassment and violence. The organisation also recognises that democratic engagement goes beyond supporting elected officials. Therefore, it has offered help to women running for office, assistants working for parliamentarians, as well as lobbyists and canvassers.

After a three month consultation with victims, the organisation found that nearly 80% of women who experience sexual violence or harassment leave politics. Any further trainings therefore sought to ensure that women's democratic participation does not stop with sexual harassment. As part of its advocacy campaign, the organisation lobbies with legislatures and political parties to change internal structures and guarantee prompt response to sexual harassment, but also raise awareness for the need to promote long-term shifts toward consent culture within political spheres and the broader society.

The organisation provides evidenced-based support to survivors taking account of testimonies and of consultation with experts and local community groups. Their Sexual Violence Support Toolkit has helped 85 young women including elected officials, candidates and volunteers. The targeted support takes account of intersectionality and diversity of experiences at all levels in view of the need for inclusive preventative measures which create a safer space for all women in politics.

#### **Justice for All, Syrian Women's League (Syria)**

The "Justice for All" initiative aims to ensure the rights of Syrian women to participate in the discussion and the adoption of transitional justice programs in Syria. It aims to promote women's rights by integrating the gender dimension into consultation mechanisms after resolution of the conflict. Allowing

women victims and refugees to be recognised in post-conflict Syria will be key to ensure they receive the needed support and will empower them to seek justice and advocate for their rights.

As in every conflict women and girls are subjected to sexual and physical violence and abuse as a weapon and consequence of war. Many women and girls are being forced to marry non-Syrian men without any say in it. Since they cannot pass on their nationality to their children on the same basis as men, nor they can own property, these women are left in a vulnerable position, while their children remain at an increased risk of statelessness.

In light of these concerns, a workshop organised by Syrian Women's League with Syrian human rights organisations from different political backgrounds, focused on the challenges and needs facing women in participating in transitional justice mechanisms. The workshop produced a number of suggestions which take into account rights of women victims and refugees. These include empowering women to obtain their rights to property, enabling them to protect their rights to custody and guardianship of their children, and providing them with the necessary compensation to continue their life. Provision of psychological support will be vital to ensure that women feel safe to speak up of their experiences and call for accountability of their abusers.

## What happened?

### **It happens to every woman, not just elected women**

When we think about violence and sexism in political institutions, we mainly think about women parliamentarians. The IPU-PACE study revealed the systemic occurrence of sexism, harassment and violence against female MPs. The debate highlighted however that violence against women can happen at all spheres of democratic participation and we have to look and search for data beyond the experiences of elected officials. From campaigning and local canvassing to widespread domestic voter intimidation, a culture of violence obstructs true democratic participation of women and the effective representation of their interests. Since violence against women in politics is a reflection of gender-based violence in general, it is crucial to design measures that empower all victims of gender-based violence to call offenders to account. The ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention was cited as essential in connection with the vital support, protection and effective prosecution measures which enable all survivors to confront violence.

### **Women's effective representation in politics comes with designing an appropriate forum to thrive**

52.9% of parliamentarians and assistants in Europe said that acts of violence had affected their freedom of expression causing them to become more "guarded." Giving women the appropriate forum to thrive is undoubtedly connected to women's effective participation in political process. The prevailing impunity for sexual harassment and violence can compromise this aim as male parliamentarians are left unaccountable in the context of stereotypical hierarchical relations between men and women, largely because women are under-represented and subjected to gender stereotyping. The only way to stop the culture of violence is to enforce disciplinary sanctions by establishing independent mechanisms to which women could turn to in the event of being victimised and ensure that parliamentary immunity is not a barrier for legal actions for sexual harassment in Parliament. Confidentiality was seen as key in order to prevent secondary victimisation and encourage women to report without worrying about the risk of reprisal.

Giving women the appropriate forum to thrive was mentioned in relation to the need to recognise the diversity of experiences and the higher risk of abuse against women belonging to minorities. On this

note, the discussant spoke about the need to pay attention to women who are put in vulnerable position and are at a higher risk of violence in particular contexts such as in Syria. Even before the conflict started, the state did not give women the right to establish organisations with the effect of compromising the advent of women's rights and their effective voice in democracy. Nevertheless, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 calls for measures which recognise the conflict on women, including the presence of women at the peaceable. There is an opportunity and a call for action therefore to ensure that women's voices are heard in post-conflict Syria for a sustainable and long-lasting peace.

### **Long-term shift towards a gender-sensitive culture in politics**

The discussion focused on awareness-raising measures promoting a gender sensitive culture in politics and in public life. In Parliament, this includes addressing all gender stereotypes, but also actively engaging men as a key partner in campaigning for zero tolerance of violence against women. In society, this includes the need to address toxic masculinity, women's subordination, and the prevalence and underreporting of all forms of gender-based violence.

### **Conclusion**

- ✓ To focus on preventing and prosecuting all measures of gender-based violence as well as supporting and protecting victims by ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).
- ✓ To establish an independent investigation mechanisms and enforce sanctions against abusers in political institutions in order to end impunity for acts of violence and sexism against women.
- ✓ To ensure that women parliamentarians and assistants have access to support services that provides assistance on a confidential basis.
- ✓ To establish awareness raising campaigns in political institutions and beyond, with the aim of long-term shifts toward consent culture, gender equality and promote integrity and respect for everyone.
- ✓ Ensure that preventive measures toward creating safer spaces for women in politics take into account intersectionality and diversity of experiences
- ✓ Need to fight underreporting on violence against women in parliament (through surveys and monitoring) in order to fight sexist behavior

## LAB 5 – Activism vs Law: can greater awareness stop sexual harassment in the public space?

### **Moderator:**

**Ms Caterina BOLOGNESE**, Head of Gender Equality Division, Council of Europe

### **Initiatives:**

**Hollaback! Jakarta (Indonesia)** by **Ms Anindya NASTITI RESTUVIANI**

**Yalla Let's Bike (Syria)** by **Mr Mohamad AL KAWATLI**

**Shooting Touch (Rwanda)** by **Ms Chloe ROTHMAN**

### **Discussant:**

**Ms Karin NORDMEYER**, Chair, UN Women National Committee for Germany

### The lab in brief

Physical and verbal sexual harassment in the public space is a pervasive phenomenon that predominantly affects women worldwide. This gender-based discrimination and violence can be addressed through two complementary ways: legislative measures and civil society organisations' advocacy. Therefore, laws and activism are highly correlated and can reinforce each other. This lab stressed the need to reflect on the links between legislations and advocacy actions on the ground in different national contexts. The presentations emphasised the role of civil society organisations in the strategic use of existing legal frameworks and the implementation of projects in rural areas to spread awareness and gender norms that value women's empowerment and self-reliance.

### About the initiatives

#### **Hollaback! Jakarta (Indonesia)**

*Hollaback! Jakarta* initiative aims to end physical and verbal sexual harassment in public space by using online activities and a mobile application that provides safe platform for people to map exactly where the acts of harassment took place. It also provides a safe space for women to share their experiences and to write a testimony of the violence they have been victim of in the public space. Through the online platform, women are informed and trained against all forms of public harassment. Furthermore, to bridge the statistical gap, data are regularly collected on street harassment.

#### **Yalla Let's Bike (Syria)**

The initiative *Yalla Let's Bike* started in 2014 with the aim to encourage both women and men of all backgrounds to ride bikes in Damascus, Syria. The initiative emerged after the Damascus municipalities passed legislation in May 2013 authorising bike usage. Even if riding bikes was allowed to everyone, women in Syria who dare to ride were not socially accepted and faced verbal sexual harassment. Using Facebook, *Yalla Let's Bike* initiative organises events where people cycle together and where women are thought how to ride a bike. Since 2014, the organisers have observed an increase in women participation in the female only rallies to reach 350 cyclists in 2018. By defying traditional gender roles and promoting cycling as an eco-friendly and safe mode of transport, *Yalla Let's Bike* is a multidimensional initiative that promotes the building of a sustainable society.

#### **Shooting Touch (Rwanda)**

Shooting Touch, since 2012, uses the power of sport to empower disadvantaged youth and women in rural areas of Rwanda. Since the 1994 genocide, 67% of Rwandans are under the age of 25 and this international non-governmental organisation sought to engage the youth through basketball. Access to

physical activity is deeply linked with health condition but also with gender equality as women's basketball practice is stigmatised. *Shouting Touch* aims to marry the values and skills learned on the court with lessons and experiences that target improved health, citizenry, and empowerment. It provides 350 at-risk Rwandan women with increased access to physical activity, healthcare (such as HIV and malaria testing), job trainings, and leadership skills to challenge male-dominant socio-cultural norms. The organisation also coordinated events opened to men where they were invited to play basketball and to attend gender trainings to sensitize the whole community.

## What happened?

**Turning seemingly trivial activities into tools to promote gender equality and to prevent sexual harassment in the public space.** Indeed, *Yalla Let's Bike* has portrayed bikes as vehicles for women empowerment by organising large scale bike rallies in Damascus. The first rally was organised in November 2014 and gathered 300 participants. Nonetheless, this diffusion of biking habits among women is made difficult by the prevalent norms within the Syrian society that depicts biking as a degrading activity for women. Indeed, some cultural beliefs still limit the free practice of women riding a bike. For instance, it is still widely believed that women could lose their virginity after cycling. This observation, that women who ride bikes face moral judgment and verbal harassment from bystanders, has led *Yalla Let's Bike* to organise events that only targeted women. The first events with only female participants took place in September 2014. At that time, 20 women took part to the rally to defy gender stereotypes. Later, in December 2017, 350 joined the same events and cycled together. By organising female rally, the initiative uses the biking as a tool to deconstruct traditional gender norms and promote women's self-reliance. In the same vein, *Shouting Touch* has used basketball as an entry point to make gender equality run. It started as a sport-oriented initiative that aimed at engaging young Rwandese in basketball. At first Ms Chloe ROTHMAN, admitted that she did not anticipate how much the traditional gender norms in the rural areas of Rwanda would influence the activity of the organisation. Indeed, as a foreign non-governmental organisation, *Shouting Touch* had to understand the local community before implementing its activities. At the beginning, they did not realise that girls who wear shorts and play basketball were stigmatised in the community. The organisation started then to organise gender trainings among women and at the community level to destigmatise the female practice of basketball. As a result, *Shouting Touch* has involved 300 Rwandese women that use sport to free themselves from traditional social norms and discrimination.

The need to pursue inclusive strategies that involve men to promote and "normalise" gender equality was also underlined by both presenters. In the case of *Yalla Let's Bike*, most of the rallies were opened to both female and male participants. According to Mr Mohamad AL KAWATLI, this idea of enabling men and women to cycle together, can lead toward more social acceptance of Syrian women biking. Consequently, this initiative can participate in shifting the power imbalance between men and women in the public sphere. Similarly, *Shouting Touch* also seeks to engage men and boys in the fight against gender stereotypes to allow women and girls to play basketball without fearing social stigmas. Women and girls who were playing basketball were facing the risk of being socially excluded and forced to leave their home by their husband or their family. To change men's mentality concerning women playing basketball, *Shouting Touch* started to organise Family day session where men could also come to play basketball and follow a gender-sensitive training. Furthermore, they also involved young boys in a march in favor of women's rights. The objective was to make children understand at a young age that the participation of women in activities socially perceived as masculine should not be seen anymore as an act of defiance.

The **relation between national governments and civil society organisations** was also discussed by the presenters and the audience. Concerning *Yalla Let's Bike*, Mr Mohamad AL KAWATLI underlined that his initiative did not contradict the Syrian law. On the contrary, at a local level, the founders of *Yalla Let's Bike* have taken advantage of a change in the local legislation of Damascus. In May 2013, the authorisation of bike usage has been adopted by the government of Damascus. Since then, *Yalla Let's Bike* has been able to collaborate with the municipalities of Damascus and to attain some practical achievements concerning access to biking. Indeed, over the years cycling paths have been extended and there are now 200 parking lots in Damascus. While these local policy changes do not directly target gender equality, they facilitate the safe practice of cycling for both men and women. In Rwanda, in the post genocide era, the government has been a vocal supporter of gender equality and Rwanda has now the highest representation of women in the parliament. Nonetheless, Ms Chloe ROTHMAN noted that the gender equality policy of the government is only resonant in the capital city, Kigali, but has not reached the countryside yet. This observation is especially relevant in the Rwandese context because most of the population is still leaving in rural areas where traditional social norms are still widespread. This marginalisation of the rural population from the government policy on gender equality justified the set-up of *Shooting Touch* in the village to promote gender equality beyond Kigali.

Finally, the presenters, the discussant and the audience have underlined **the importance for civil society organisations advocating for gender equality to ensure the sustainability of their action**. Access to financial resources remains an important and complex issue as many women's organisations still face the problem of lack of funding. Mr Mohamad AL KAWATLI has explained that the events organised by *Yalla Let's Bike* were sponsored by companies, but that its organisation would need additional funding to set up an office in Syria. Indeed, for now, the organisation only uses social media and can only reach a limited audience that excludes citizens who do not use or do not have access to social media.

## Conclusion

- ✓ There is a need for legislative changes and activism to mirror each other: legal reforms should disrupt stereotypical gender norms but they are not enough for change on the field, hence the necessity for civil society to engage in initiatives challenging said stereotypes and violence.
- ✓ To counter social norms that legitimise gender inequality, it is essential for civic initiatives to raise awareness among the whole society by developing projects involving women and girls but also some other programs targeting men and boys.
- ✓ Need to pursue inclusive strategies that involve men to promote and "normalize" gender equality was also underlined by both: it is essential that civic initiatives raise awareness among the whole society by developing projects involving women and girls as well as men and boys.

## Lab 6 – How to create safe spaces in cyberspace

**Moderator:**

**Ms Laima JUREVICIENE**, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Lithuania to the Council

**Initiatives:**

**#HerNetHerRights I and II** by **Ms Asha ALLEN**

**Discussant:**

**Ms Karen ROSS**, United Kingdom, Professor of Gender and Media, Newcastle University  
**Ms Chiara TOMASI**, Public Policy and Government Relations Analyst, Google

### The lab in brief

The digital space holds the promise of achieving stronger and more diverse citizen participation in politics. Despite existing data gaps, there is a growing evidence of the need to regulate sexist and violent behaviour online. What are women's experiences on the internet? How does violence against women in the cyberspace impact their personal and professional development? What are ways to render the cyberspace more accepting of diversity? Can we get rid of sexist online hate speech? Should women create more safe spaces to avoid sexist and violent behaviour online?

This lab aimed to discuss whether online behaviour should be regulated in order to eradicate sexist hate speech and any other form of violence against women in the cyberspace.

### About the initiatives

#### **#HerNetHerRights I and II, European Women's Lobby**

The rise of online violence against women and girls (VAWG) has denied women autonomy over their own bodies and voices in cyberspaces, causing not only severe social implications on their online and offline lives but also on their financial resources. Online VAWG often also has lifelong consequences in terms of mental and physical health and well-being. #HerNetHerRights I was a six-month project led by the European Women's Lobby (EWL) to analyse the current state of online VAWG in Europe and to create a safer, more inclusive web for all women and girls.

This initiative consisted of two phase. The first phase was based on a research carried out over six months during 2017 to "analyse the current state of online violence against women and girls in Europe and create a safer, more inclusive Web for all women and girls". The main findings of the research were presented in October 2017 through an on-line conference with participants intervening from several European capitals – the idea was to hold a truly Pan-European event.

The second phase, ongoing, see a series of activities to be carried out in the run up to the European Parliament 2019 elections, to prepare and support women candidates. Mostly information and training activities, aiming to give candidates concrete, technical tools to better lead their campaign online and to improve their political communication in general.

The project has solid foundations provided by the research phase that opened it. Adequate knowledge of the issue allows for more effective action to address it.

## What happened?

### The key importance of language.

Attention should be put on words and their meaning. For example, the expression “cyber bullying” is replaced by “cyberviolence” as the European Women’s Lobby considers the latter more accurate and effective a term. Similarly, “online child abuse” is presented as more accurate than “cybergrooming”.

In the same vein, **reflexion has focused around the right definitions**, as online abuse targeting women can be considered a form of psychological violence as described by the Istanbul Convention. Hate speech and its implication is also to be reflected upon and needs to find a general definition accepted across Europe which may help to reduce the “grey area” between hate speech and expression that is covered by freedom of expression under art.10 of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

## Conclusion

- ✓ The need to find a definition of hate speech that is generally accepted across Europe, which may help to reduce the “grey area” between hate speech and expression that is covered by freedom of expression under art.10 of the ECHR.
- ✓ The importance of education as a process allowing to acquire the tools needed to correctly interpret the information provided by the Web and to protect oneself from some forms of abuse. Internet users, particularly young people, should become aware of their rights and be able to know when these are breached.



## Lab 7 – Will closing the gender gap in the economy lead to greater political equality?

### **Moderator:**

**Ms Anne NÈGRE**, Chair of University Women of Europe and Vice President of the Council of Europe's Conference of INGOs, France

### **Initiatives:**

**Talent naar de top, Talent to the Top foundation (Netherlands)** by **Mr Dirk HAMAKER**

**Fearless Futures (United Kingdom)** by **Ms Sara SHAHVISI**

**Cercle InterElles (France)** by **Ms Catherine LADOUSSE**

### **Discussant:**

**Ms Rosa María SÁNCHEZ-YEBRA ALONSO**, Vice-Governor of the Council of Europe Development Bank

### The lab in brief

Despite considerable advances in the number of women in the workforce across Europe and in particular in Western Europe, women remain at a disadvantage in the workplace and are not adequately represented in enterprise at all levels and in all sectors. There is clear evidence of the continued existence of deeply held prejudices, and the incompatibility of certain neoliberal views of equality – the merit-based approach – with the principles of equity which drive the moral imperative of closing the gender gap. The narrow conception of “quality” in the workplace is a barrier to diversity, because its very system of measurement is permeated with the presumptions of the dominant class, predominantly composed of old, white men.

The three initiatives which were presented all attempt to break down the invisible barriers of professional life in three very different ways. As the moderator Anne NEGRE surmised, they all work towards the same consequence, allowing women to become “vectors of citizenship”, to participate more fully in professional life, to impose themselves in the important economic sphere and disturb or refashion its traditional codes. A common theme was to “visibilise the invisible”, to bring gender to the table as a topic of conversation in economic practice, and thereby force a change in attitude and praxis.

Whether through systems of quotas and voluntary targets, networks designed to support women in their professional development, or immersive workshops aimed at deconstructing the latent hierarchies of race and gender in the world of work, the results are multi-faceted. Firstly, women's presence and its acknowledgement have a positive economic effect at the micro and macro level, for example companies with a higher share of female leaders see a 41% higher return on equity and, if the gender gap was closed, the Eurozone could grow by 13%. Secondly, organisation among women can foreground different ways of thinking and acting, increasing experimentation and creativity, which may favour structural change even within large companies and organisations. Finally, understanding the positions of women and other marginalised groups enables changes in behaviour which encourage inclusive practices and change fundamentally the social relationships between people's different identities.

Perhaps latent within the discussion was the acknowledgement that the economy and the workplace are today (as always) a place of political struggle. “Power” is no longer defined by or confined to political office. Individual's social status, privileges and power are closely linked to their economic situation and this continues to be an important theme for feminist theory. Further, businesses today wield ever greater power in a context of globalisation and technological innovation. This raises questions about the

representativeness of the people running those enterprises. The need for systemic change to include more women in decision making structures was underlined by many participants.

## About the initiatives

### **Talent naar de Top**

The number of women in positions of economic power, in particular on the executive boards of companies, is low in the Netherlands. Talent naar de Top (Talent to the Top) is a foundation which directly addresses this problem with its Charter, asking businesses to sign up voluntarily to ambitious targets for females in management roles – over 260 organisations including major Dutch brands are currently members. Talent naar de Top's adherents are encouraged by positive means to improve the representation of women in top positions, and receive information and training sessions and coaching to assist them in meeting their targets. Reports are regularly presented to the company management to monitor progress. The companies compete for annual awards set up by the foundation. The approach has shown significant results - against a background of only 6% of executives in the top 100 companies being female, its members have achieved an average rate of 27%. However, they highlighted challenges to the continued success of the model – conversations have moved on to focus closely on cultural diversity and other organisations receive funding from the government to work in this area, threatening to crowd out the space for necessary discussion of persistent gender discrimination. In this evolving environment, Talent naar de Top seeks to integrate cultural questions into its framework and continue to advance towards a fair gender-balance in high-powered positions.

### **Fearless Futures**

Fearless Futures proposes workshops on equality and discrimination from an intersectional perspective to professionals working in a wide variety of domains. Over several days, the workshops tackle issues of sexism, racism, ableism, and other markers of identity through challenging “experiential” sessions including role-play and dialogue, asking participants to confront and overcome their own internalised prejudices. Participants are encouraged to deconstruct their own complicity and recognise their own fragility preventing them from acknowledging the negative gender/race stereotypes we all participate in reproducing. While this can be a difficult process, it is seen as necessary to “unlearn” toxic behaviours. Fearless Futures' philosophy emphasises the need to reconstruct gendered activity on two levels in business; first in the immediate surrounding where women are frequently overlooked or undermined in their career progression, secondly in the output of every business, be it consumer goods, services, or advertisement – which may all implicitly carry these gender markers. Participants are given knowledge to help them support colleagues in marginalised social groups and feel more comfortable acting as allies in the workplace. The methodology of “design for inclusion” is applied to workplace strategies in an effort to create lasting change. Business, and the workplace in general, is hence treated as a political sphere capable of exerting power to condition individual's choices along gendered lines of division, and actors male and female are taught how to counter .

### **Cercle InterElles**

Cercle InterElles is a network supporting women's professional inclusion and advancement in the science and technology sector. Gender equality in that sector is hampered not only by a relatively small percentage of female staff which can be seen as a result of the continued predominance of male university students in STEM subjects, but also by the prejudicial assumptions surrounding career progression for female scientists, who are likely to find their career opportunities restricted to roles in human resources, finance and communication where their expertise is not utilised fully. The pervasiveness of stereotypes was demonstrated to the audience and panel through a mental exercise

which showed how hard it is for everyone (even experts in gender equality) mentally to associate women with enterprise. Cercle InterElles adopts an inclusive approach designed to give women the tools to prosper within and ultimately change the masculine environment of the large technology companies which are represented within its membership structure. Men and women are invited to discuss issues in their companies, to share experiences and to develop methods to improve women's situations which can then be transposed to other companies, through developing concrete proposals for action by the management (for example, concerning maternity leave), or giving women tools to deal with situations such as salary negotiations. The format of Cercle InterElles is important as it produces opportunities for networking, allowing women to develop the skills expected to be used in professional interactions. Through its various actions, the network explores the relations between women and power and gives them the tools to advance and support each other in a male-dominated world.

## What happened?

### **Correlation between women in economics and women in politics.**

Women's equality is essential, and from a legal point of view the belief was that women across Europe are having their European Social Charter rights to equal pay and working conditions violated. In order to achieve freedom and democracy we must achieve equal employment conditions. It was also noted by several panel-members that although problematic, ranking of companies could be an effective means to put pressure on them to achieve gender equality. Women's participation is contingent on their economic equality. This goes with the problem of campaign funding as well, one of the basic requirements for anyone wishing to begin a political career. In current conditions, men are both most likely to possess sufficient means to fund a campaign, and to be chosen to receive those funds as a candidate. However, it was noted that rules on funding of political parties at the level of the state could respond to these problems.

### **Multilevel solutions.**

The discussion demonstrated that actors at several different levels are relevant to the question of female political empowerment through economic means. Action is possible at the level of the state with implementing equal pay legislation, at the level of the organisation making structural changes to accommodate women, and at the level of the individual, both to eradicate inbuilt prejudices and to become vectors of citizenship through positive collective action.

## Conclusion

- ✓ Encourage women's careers in male dominated areas such as businesses, applied sciences and ICT's
- ✓ Promote the development of mentoring schemes for women in the private sector
- ✓ Reform parental leave and other care leave schemes in such a way as to achieve equality between women and men in the sharing of unpaid care work, for example through non-transferable entitlements for each parent
- ✓ Strive to include genuine gender equality as a value of corporate culture, including by tackling all forms of overt and hidden gender bias in internal structures and processes, and exert peer pressure on competitors to do the same

## Lab 8 – Can gender stereotypes be banned from the media?

*Sponsored by the City of Strasbourg*

**Moderator:**

**Ms Nawel RAFIK-ELMRINI**, Deputy Mayor of the City of Strasbourg, France

**Initiatives:**

**Ukraine without sexism** by **Ms Oleksandra GOLUB**

**Chiennes de garde (France)** by **Ms Marie-Noelle BAS**

**Discussant:**

**Mr Israel NISAND**, Gynecologist, France

### The lab in brief

Gender-based stereotypes in the media, because they are many and often trivialised, contribute to discrimination against women and prevent gender equality. But worse still, stereotypes have been integrated by women, who modify their behavior and change their perceptions of themselves. In this vein, stereotypes deserve a very special attention among NGOs, policy-makers and citizens. Two European initiatives - namely Ukraine without sexism and Chiennes de garde - have set fight against gender stereotypes in the media as their priority.

#### What are gender stereotypes?

In its 2018-2023 Gender equality strategy, the Council of Europe states: “gender stereotypes are preconceived social and cultural patterns or ideas whereby women and men are assigned characteristics and roles determined and limited by their sex. Gender stereotyping presents a serious obstacle to the achievement of real gender equality and feeds into gender discrimination.” Because of their assigned sex, people are expected to act, speak, dress and conduct themselves in a certain way. These gender stereotypes may be conveyed and spread by the media.

### About the initiatives

#### Ukraine without sexism

*Ukraine without sexism* aims at reducing the amount of sexism content in the media thanks to a citizen-monitoring process. The movement created a six-step-mechanism: firstly, citizens can get more information about sexism in the media thanks to the League’s website and thus detect discriminatory advertising. Then, citizens can send screenshots of these discriminatory contents to the League. After that, the League will appeal to government agencies to enquire about these violations. If the authorities consider that an advertisement is sexist, it will have to be removed and the company will be fined. This mechanism creates a network of inspectors in different Ukrainian cities and teaches them how to recognise discriminatory content. However, the outcomes are still limited: indeed, in one and a half year, more than five hundred complaints have been filed but only thirty were considered as sexist. As a consequence, the monitoring aspect cannot be separated from educational and lobbying aspects.

#### Chiennes de garde

Since 1999 the French NGO *Chiennes de garde* has been monitoring gender stereotypes in advertising, TV shows and art production. In its daily work, the association reports abuses and files complaints before the competent authorities. Once a year, it rewards the “Nerd of the year” who pronounced the

most sexist comment in the media. Despite the French legal framework regarding discrimination and regulatory agencies, in practice, recognising prejudices against women and punishing their offenders remains extremely difficult. Indeed, laws are too general with no competent authority dedicated to sexism in the media. The non-governmental body in charge of regulating advertising issues advisory opinions only while the Superior Council of the Audiovisual sometimes invokes the sense of humour and eyes pleasure to justify sexism. As a consequence, many feminist organisations have resigned themselves not to lodge complaints. *Chiennes de garde* is fighting for the setting up of appropriate legal tools in order to ban gender stereotypes from the media. For **Marie-Noelle BAS**, President of *Chiennes de garde*, although stereotypes are persistent, the citizens' level of tolerance towards sexism is getting lower.

## What happened?

### The question of pornographic content.

Because of taboos on sexual issues and the lack of effective sexual education, the new generations tend to automatically turn to the internet to find answers to their questions. **Israel NISAND**, as a gynecologist, has noticed the growing influence of pornography on children's mental depiction of women. Indeed, for decades, the pornography industry has shown male domination and female degradation. It is now time to regulate the access to pornography – as governments did with Islamic propaganda on the web - and harshly fine pornographic content providers when disrespecting the law on minor protection. During the debate, the audience wondered if prohibiting pornography at all might be a response. However, it should be highlighted that stereotypes in the media are not so inconsistent compared to pornography. When confronted to pornography, people expect to be shocked and excited whereas, when confronted with daily sexism in the media, they will not react because it has become a common thing to them.

### The role of social networks.

Regarding the fight against gender-based stereotypes, the role of social networks has been ambiguous and still is. On the one hand, web users act as barometers and are essential to fill the legal vacuum. The #MeToo movement exemplifies this situation. On the other hand, social networks offer an excellent communication space for those wishing to express sexist statements without getting into trouble. Lastly, all women do not face sexism and violence with the same intensity. For instance, female refugees are a very vulnerable group of people and they deserve special attention and appropriate policies.

## Conclusion

- ✓ Authorities/legislator have to put a framework in place that doesn't allow sexist or discriminatory content
- ✓ Foster inclusive writing by using gender-sensitive language and portyal of women as promoters of change
- ✓ Employ more women in prominent positions (e.g. commentators, news anchors) and in media decision-making
- ✓ Create/join transnational journalism partnerships to promote gender equality and to expose gender-related abuse

## Lab 9 – Fighting trafficking in Human beings

### **Moderator:**

**Ms Corina CĂLUGĂRU**, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Moldova to the Council of Europe

### **Initiatives:**

**Women’s rights without borders: cross-border areas in Europe facing prostitution, KBTask (France)** by **Ms Rebecca BREITMAN** and **Ms Mathilde KARCELES**  
**Red Tra Sex (Latin American)** by **Ms Elena Eva REYNEGA**  
**Bagel Bejgl (Serbia)** by **Ms Jelena HRNJAK**

### **Discussant:**

**Graziella PIGA**, Gender Expert, Italy

### The lab in brief

Women have been proven to be the main victims of human trafficking. What can governments; states and organisations do to prevent trafficking from occurring? What can be done to help the survivors to rejoin society and have access to education and employment? This lab focuses on ways to stop human trafficking as well as helping and empowering the survivors to ensure their reintegration and rehabilitation.

### About the initiatives

#### **Women’s rights without borders: cross-border areas in Europe facing prostitution, KBTask**

It is a European and citizen initiative that was launched on 8 March 2018 by a tribune signed by 64 political figures. Its goal is to highlight the rights of women in the cross-border environment. This tribune was the first Franco-German tribune on that topic. This initiative was born from the observation that the French and German counterparts did not know each other while they were working on the same problems, hence the idea of federating and gathering good practices with regards to women’s rights starting by prostitution. There are differences on both sides of the border: France has an abolitionist perspective of prostitution while in Germany it is regulated. Good practices could be replicated in other territories with similar specificities and thus benefit more people.

#### **Red Tra Sex**

This initiative aims to strengthen the rights of sex workers and to develop national sex workers’ organisations. RedTraSex is a Latin American network of organisations from 14 Latin American and Caribbean countries gathering sex workers and / or former sex workers. These sex workers are organising to ensure that sex work is recognised as a right in its own right. It is a network of volunteers. For the representative of this network, there should be a discussion with sex workers on the issue of trafficking and the dignity of sex workers in order to reach decisions that take their opinion into account. For Elena Eva REYNEGA, there is an urgent need to raise awareness among the medical profession and law enforcement agencies to these issues, which are often poorly understood in these areas.

#### **Bagel Bejgl**

In the 1990s, women from Eastern Europe came to Serbia and were victims of trafficking. Since 2003-2004, there has been a victim protection system with the opening of a shelter for these women. Subsequently, a more economic and sustainable approach was developed to empower victims and help them to rebuild their lives. This led to the creation of a social enterprise in Serbia selling bagels. Girls

aged 14-15, victims of trafficking, work in this context and manage to emancipate themselves from their past. This initiative aims to encourage these women and restore their self-confidence.

### What happened?

Ms Graziella PIGA commented and analysed the various initiatives that emerged from the Lab. In her opinion, these are three local initiatives that share a common origin in trafficking, exploitation and violence against women. These initiatives emphasise the importance of women owning their bodies and not belonging to someone else. She highlighted the local initiative, whereas here in Strasbourg, in cross-border territory, trafficking (prostitution) is present at sessions of the European Parliament. The initiative for sex work to be recognized as a profession in its own right is very important. If these women obtain more rights and recognition, it will reduce trafficking and increase their rights. On the other hand, it is important to educate boys at an early age to respect gender.

As a gender specialist, **she notes a global lack of statistics in this field**. Trafficking in human beings gives rise to few studies and data sharing by institutions. It is essential that the Council of Europe's legal and institutional tools are effectively implemented by governments to protect these women.

### Conclusion

- ✓ Create and put to use an effective gender-sensitive legal framework, programmes and institutional tools to protect women from human trafficking and illegal prostitution
- ✓ There is a global need for more data and studies in the field of human trafficking
- ✓ Authorities at all level should support civil society initiatives that help preventing human trafficking as well as reintegrate its victims

## Lab 10 – Masculinities re-examined: are men the key to greater gender equality?

### **Moderator:**

**Ms Simone FILIPPINI**, Executive Director, Leadership4SDGs Foundation, the Netherlands

### **Initiatives:**

**White Ribbon (United Kingdom)** by **Mr Chris GREEN**

**Engaging Young Men to Prevent Gender-Based Violence Against Women,MAVA (India)** by **Mr Harish SADANI**

### **Discussant:**

**Mr Robert FRANKEN**, Platform „Male Feminists Europe“, Germany

### The lab in brief

Contemporary ideas and practices of manhood help men to stay on top of social hierarchies, taking advantage of privileges that men enjoy over women. Whereas the meaning of masculinity differs within cultural contexts, a strong unifying factor is that men tend to be raised to be assertive, strong, and decisive. They are trained not to experience or show either weakness or pain. Are they therefore more likely to rule over women or other men in politics, the public space and the economy? Paradoxically, the same privileges constitute a heavy burden for men who fear not to live up to expectations of manhood. Men’s exercise of power over women is also at the heart of gender based violence. What initiatives can bring men to reflect upon this power and privilege? How can men in parliaments and courts, governments and business administrations be encouraged share power with women?

The lab discussed ways of countering male domination over women in society and remove male-related privileges (“patriarchal dividend”). The lab also explored how these privileges put pressure on boys and men, and how society is not providing them with sufficient alternative behavioural models.

### About the initiatives

#### **Local Authority accreditation, White Ribbon,**

White Ribbon UK is a registered Charity since 2005, and works with partner organisations offering them accredited status as involving men in challenging male violence if they comply with the required criteria. Accredited organisations include large city councils, (Manchester and Leeds), Large County Councils (Lancashire, Cornwall), police forces in the United Kingdom, fire and rescue services, housing associations and health authorities, universities, music venues and sports clubs.

White Ribbon UK’s main mission consists of reducing violence against women and girls and its consequences by engaging men and boys as “change agents” to influence the way men think and behave. Its theory of change is predicated on the idea that men and boys can be encouraged to see violence prevention as “their issue too”, and influence other men and boys not to be part of the problem, and to be part of the solution.

#### **Engaging Young Men to Prevent Gender-Based Violence Against Women, MAVA**

Men Against Violence and Abuse (MAVA) has been registered in 1993 and is India’s first organisation by men to stop and prevent gender-based violence and abuse of women and girls.

MAVA’s initiative aims to sensitise and mentor young men in their twenties to issues of gender, sexuality and masculinity, engage them in a wide range of activities and equip them with skills to communicate effectively with peers and other young men spreading messages on preventing gender-based violence



on women. The initiative selects young men between 18 and 20 years studying in colleges and from varied socio-economic backgrounds and sensitises them on gender issues using out-of-the box methods, enabling them to deconstruct toxic masculinity, self-introspect through a churn and reconstruct ideas about masculinity. The group of mentees, while being mentored by Team MAVA is trained to gradually communicate and engage fresh batches of male mentees using the tools they acquired.

## What happened?

### **Negative mindsets in both men and women.**

*Media, especially advertising, continued to bombard men with stereotypic images of dominant masculinity.*

Harish SADANI (MAVA, India) pointed to a shocking survey showing that in India 28.8% women had experienced spousal violence, and that 57% of boys and 53% girls considered that violence against women (for instance beating for refusal of sex) was normal and acceptable. In many cases girls and women had internalised the violence perpetrated against them.

Although acceptance of violence was not so extreme in other parts of the world, participants in the discussion gave examples from all over Europe and beyond of “ordinary discrimination” present in language and behaviour, at all levels of society and among all age-groups (examples: “how do you manage to be a politician and mother of three children?” or “sons are easier than daughters”).

There was a need to combat what was called “bad education” – young men increasingly got their “sexual education” from online pornography, again carrying stereotypes while at the same time likely to engender feelings of inadequacy and frustration at the gap between fiction and reality, in turn leading to violence and even self-hatred. One participant stated that in the UK, the main cause of death among young men was suicide.

### **The pressure of outdated social models**

In the discussion outdated social models were much criticised, and some differences between European countries rose. A writer/storyteller in the audience had listened to many women whose stories proved that families could be dangerous places, where many found themselves in a financial trap or pressured by social models to stay in a family despite the violence. Children were witnesses to violence and no school programmes showed them sufficiently what was “normal” and what wasn’t.

It was also pointed out that attention should be paid not to put women (or that they not put themselves) in the position of victims, either in everyday situations or in discourse. The example given was taken from war, where a common concept was that men were going to Syria to save the women.

### **Bringing about change**

Chris GREEN’s objective with *White Ribbon* was to “get men to challenge other men”, using as many multiplying factors as possible and engaging “talk” in concerts, schools, workplaces and on social media. He asked the Lab audience to imagine a world without violence and to give some adjectives: these were “peaceful” “harmonious”, “beautiful” exciting” “safe” “sensitive”, “free from prejudice”. Then he asked

what was preventing this world from coming about. The answers were: “social conditioning”, “patriarchy”, “prejudice”, “tradition”, “gender stereotypes”.

The projects were based on the premise that men need to talk about themselves before they can support women. The two projects presented were relatively small initiatives, but which had the potential for multiplication through ambassadors, champions, mentors and networks.

Some conditions for change came out of the discussions - financial independence for women, effective law enforcement, equality in language and images through new narratives and training, and the attribution of qualities which did not refer to “male versus female”. Change could only come about through men, who too often did not feel concerned and did not mobilise for campaigns and meetings.

Good practices were given from Kosovo and Albania with a programme called “Be a man”, from Greece where non-formal education was used to promote gender equality, and to explore the differences between gender identity and biology. Change was slow but present.

### **Problems with implementation of policies**

*Conflicts make all violence, even domestic violence, worse*

Most participants agreed that change was not happening quickly enough. Declared policies on gender equality and justice were often not implemented and there was felt to be a general lack of initiative or a sense of urgency on the part of men to change or even question their behaviour. More often than not, men rejected the idea that they are benefiting from a “patriarchal dividend”.

Chris GREEN saw the lack of visibility as a challenge, which was why *White Ribbon’s* campaign enlisted celebrities to support the movement, conducted an online pledge to cease violence, and at local levels trained men (“ambassadors”) and women (“champions”) to give the example and talk to communities at grass-roots level. Politicians were also a good channel for putting pressure on businesses.

Discussion raised the need for equality in law: women who turned their backs on domestic violence and reported to police saw that punishment was almost always light, and after a few days support these women were left to face realities alone. On the other side men were not aware of what was expected of them, and there was evidence everywhere of a certain backlash against equality though men’s sense that by sharing they would be losing power.

In response to a question on the dangers of celebrity endorsement without true conviction, Chris Green felt that this form of “window-dressing” was at least a foot in the door for progress.

### **Conclusion**

- ✓ Men need to challenge other men about their masculinity: being entrapped in their own gender stereotype they will firstly only understand and accept new models when these are suggested by peers. The predominance of traditional stereotypes and the lack of positive models in the close entourage of boys and young men perpetuate violent, dominant behaviour. Therefore, men need to talk about themselves before they can support women and need to understand what they themselves will gain from treating women as equals.
- ✓ Change needs to be brought about at all levels, from political decision-making to the everyday dimensions like language, education and media exposure. It is not happening fast enough
- ✓ Non-formal and formal education at home, school and work and from the earliest age are vital

## Lab 11 – How can women use the law to fight gender-based violence?

### **Moderator:**

**Mr Roeland BÖCKER**, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Council of Europe

### **Initiatives:**

**Sem3i Sawtk (Get heard), Youth Empowerment Society (Morocco)** by **Ms Fadwa KAMAL**

**Self-Representation of Women in Kenyan Courts, Federation of Women Lawyers (Kenya)** by **Ms Teresa OMONDI-ADEITAN**

**Italian academic network on the Istanbul Convention** by **Marina CALLONI**

### **Discussant:**

**Ms Agnieszka NOGAL**, Expert on feminism and human rights, Poland

**Ms Anna RIVINA**, Alumna of School of Civic Education of the Council of Europe, Co-founder and manager of the "No Violence" project, Russian Federation

### The lab in brief

One in three women experience violence simply because they are women. Laws and policies can provide the foundation for a coordinated and comprehensive approach to violence against women. The United Nations and the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) note that while an unprecedented number of laws and policies against violence are now in place, implementation is still lagging behind. Which legal mechanisms successfully promote women's human rights and equal representation of women? What are existing legal gaps that need to be closed? Women around the world are mobilised to stand up for women's rights. What are their experiences and recommendations, and how can citizens contribute to implementing existing law frameworks?

### About the initiatives

#### **Sem3i Sawtk (Get heard)**

Youth Society Empowerment (تمكيني في المجتمع) (in Arabic) is an independent NGO based in Teflet (Morocco) aiming to create an educated micro-society of youth through experiences and skills exchange by spreading the culture of dialogue that consolidates the principles of democracy and gender equality.

(Get Heard) is a Moroccan initiative that highlights rights and laws to protect women, and helps broadcast their stories to the world. It is implemented by YES (Youth Empowerment Society), led by Soufiyan Saaoudi with the support of IRI (International Republican Institute) in partnership with Code For Africa, 4shabab and other educational institutions based in Morocco. The initiative aims at introducing girls and women from different Moroccan cities to the national and international laws and regulations protecting them from sexual harassment, violence and extortion. It also uses its platform to teach them basic skills and techniques to produce their own podcast, in order to have a voice online to tell their stories.

#### **FIDA Kenya**

FIDA Kenya is a women's rights organisation established in 1985 with the main aim of providing free legal aid services to women and children in Kenya.

The initiative originated from the increased need for legal representation of women in court to access their various rights. FIDA Kenya modelled, therefore, a women friendly and empowering product to access justice, and empowers women to represent themselves in court. FIDA builds these women's legal

literacy, prepares and provides the court documents to them and trains them to speak in the courts. An average of 350 cases is filed per year with an 85% success rate. FIDA lawyers also tried to respond to manifestations of misogyny and sexism in the courts, appealing against judgments containing unacceptable statements and calling for the resignation of misogynistic judges.

### **Italian academic network on the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)**

The network explores the potential role of universities under articles 11-15 of the Istanbul Convention, linking the education, research and third mission roles of universities through national and cross-border collaboration. The Italian academic network (UNIRE) has developed activities around information, formation, research, 'third mission' and international collaboration, including with the Council of Europe. Whilst legal instruments alone would not be enough, they could form the basis for educational measures to change mentalities, develop cultural policies and raise awareness. The project therefore verified the compliance of the Italian penal code with Istanbul Convention standards and worked to inform judges and lawyers in Milan about the new legislation.

### **What happened?**

One problem is **identifying and reaching women who are ready to admit to being a victim of violence and in need of help**, bearing in mind that they often have a continuing emotional connection to the perpetrator and may be culturally conditioned to feel shame and expect social exclusion if they speak out. Get Heard could be limited in its impact by the extent of access to technology, notably the internet, and of skills needed to use social media tools. The Italian academic network (UNIRE) project arguably took a too narrow approach to raising general awareness of rights. Generally speaking, it was noted that whilst legislation was important, it was not enough without social and cultural understanding, including on the part of the police and judges.

In the general discussion, participants noted that even well-developed legal instruments and mechanisms could fail to have the desired effect when the response of subject bodies was formalistic and homogeneous: **one-size-fits-all solutions usually did not work**. There was therefore a constant need for study, evaluation and reinvention. The Council of Europe pursued a strategy to combat violence against women, which included projects on access to justice involving training components intended to disseminate knowledge of law and justice from the perspective of women.

### **Conclusion**

- ✓ Need to provide support, encouragement and assistance to victims of sexual harassment through workshops geared towards training and awareness raising : Internet and social media can help by providing a platform to podcast and share experiences, thus breaking taboos and reach out to young people
- ✓ The fight against misogyny, sexism and discrimination in courts is necessary
- ✓ Legislation alone is not enough and needs to be accompanied by social and cultural understanding (governments, police, judges as well as populations)
- ✓ Importance of projects on access to justice involving training components intended to disseminate knowledge of law and justice from the perspective of women

## Lab 12 – Participatory democracy: a necessary boost for women’s power?

*Sponsored by the Democratic Society, the Council of Europe’s Incubator for Participatory Democracy, and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe*

### **Moderator:**

**Ms Meglena KUNEVA**, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the European Union Delegation to the Council of Europe

### **Initiatives:**

**Le Agora di Messina, Democratic Society (Italy)** by **Ms Francesca ATTOLINO**

**City of Ghent** (Belgium) by **Ms Anja VAN DEN DURPEL**

**Italian academic network on the Istanbul Convention** by **Marina CALLONI**

### **Discussant:**

**Ms Nina BJÖRBY**, Vice President for Democracy Assembly of the European Regions (AER) Chairperson of the Culture Committee in the Västerbotten Region

**Mr Stewart DICKSON**, member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, United Kingdom

### **The lab in brief**

This LAB discussed the effectiveness of participatory tools such as quotas, and their impact on including women in decision-making, within the existing constitutional framework of representative democracy.

As we live in societies increasingly unwilling to tolerate injustice, there is an urge to fight inequality by boosting women’s empowerment through different participatory tools. These instruments, including quotas, are put in place to allow women to climb the societal ladder through participation. Previously, the ladder was simply absent. Today, women still need to face some entry barriers, but the question on whether the available tools are up to date led the debate. The two presented initiatives aimed at demonstrating that women do not necessarily need a stage to make their voices heard.

### **About the initiatives**

#### **Le Agora di Messina**

Until recently, democratic participation in the municipality of Messina was driven by isolated events, without a systematic or longer-term vision. Political decision making was not supported by any means of the voices and experiences of local people needed.

The “Agora di Messina” initiative develops a programme of interconnected activities which seed participation at the heart of communities across Messina, working towards establishing a protocol for participation that supports independently-managed local democratic infrastructure. The key goal is to support the development of inclusive approaches involving women, young people and individuals at risk of exclusion.

#### **City of Ghent**

People from more than 150 different nationalities live in Ghent. Bringing citizens together to co-create the city and its policy is since long a priority.

From the mid-1990s on, women with Turkish and Moroccan roots organised ‘tea-afternoons’, moments to openly discuss topics like identity, participation and women empowerment. By now, this group has extended. More than 50 women and women’s organisations form together Bar Univers'elle.

They informally meet in Bar Mitte, in Ghent's Museum on industry, labour and textiles and discuss topics like sexual diversity and gender identity (e.g. project beyond He/She) and organise activities such as a privilege walk (see: <https://www.facebook.com/INGentvzw/videos/643573825829513/>).

The aim of Bar Univers'elle is to bring women, half of Ghent's citizens, together to empower the voice of women in the city.

### What happened?

#### **Quotas are a powerful instrument of participatory democracy.**

They appear to be a win-win exchange between the divestiture of centralised power, on the one hand, and the interest and participation that politics regains, on the other hand. Mainly, quotas foster the cultural change and enrich the political panorama of any country. In defining them as positive discrimination, Ms Francesca ATTOLINO considered whether the possibility or even the precondition of equal participation is enough to generate truly democratic societies and participatory democracies. In the Sicilian city of Messina, political participation does not seem to be a priority for women, as they carry the burden of child, elderly, and house care. Together with the Democratic Society, Ms ATTOLINO decided to directly ask women what was hindering them from engaging in political life, while at the same time facing their lack of confidence in speaking up. The 'Agora di Messina' was therefore born as a steering group made up by different and diverse stakeholders with the aim to jointly list the parameters to evaluate the quality of the participatory process and define gender-neutral democratic participation. The initiative aims to empower the participants to promote grass-roots democracy, even once the project, which at the moment is still work in progress, will be over.

#### **Quotas appear to be a necessary but not sufficient condition.**

With reference to Ms ATTOLINO's open question, Ms Anja VAN DEN DURPEL argued that there is the need to fill the gap between empowering women and giving them real power. On this point, she illustrated the "City of Ghent" initiative as a facilitator for women to raise their voices, and to make clear that discrimination is still invisible in our societies. With 259.000 inhabitants, the City of Ghent is home to 161 different nationalities. As a result of subsequent migratory waves, 33% of the population has a migration background – and the percentage grows up to 53% among children under the age of ten. Ms Van den Durpel noticed that women were highly dependent on their husbands, particularly when they neither had a job nor spoke the local language. As new citizens, although they cared about the garbage in the streets or the education of their children, they were not able to express their concerns. Therefore, the initiative started as informal gatherings with the pretext of drinking tea. Yet, these tea afternoons were, in reality, a sophisticated example of integration policy at a local level; not only able to lower the threshold for people to participate, but also to create peer education. Integration is a two way process: both old and new citizens learned about their respective participatory behaviours and, as a consequence, the tea afternoon quickly became a mutual process of learning.

#### **Key importance of 'positive action'.**

Both initiatives constitute an example of 'positive action', a measure that aims to encourage participation among members of a disadvantaged, under-represented group. Conversely, quotas constitute an 'affirmative action', namely a policy that balances the disadvantage artificially, but with the same aim. The former intends to address the root causes of the gender gap, whereas the latter intends to counteract its effects. In this regard, Ms Nina BJÖRBY emphasised that quotas are needed

when the power stays in the hands of the same, homogeneous group of people. In spite of the fact that some people could be more qualified than others, some voices are stronger: this does not only concern women, but also citizens with an ethnical background or income different from the average representative. Moreover, although every country has laws against sexual harassment, there is still the need for movements such as #MeToo. Such a need shows that obstacles to equality still characterise our societies and accordingly, also participation stops at some level. She also pointed out that the higher a position is on the career ladder, the more difficult it seems to free the places around the table. Notwithstanding the fact that we all allegedly live in free democracies, how free can we consider ourselves, if half of the population does not have the same freedom of the other half? Ms BJÖRBY illustrated that these circumstances also take place in Sweden, although the country is generally considered to be inclusive in terms of participation.

### **Competencies and gender.**

Several women from the audience expressed their concerns towards being elected only because of their gender. Among them Ms Bryony RUDKIN, member of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, stated that she was glad to have been a locally elected councillor for over 20 years due to her set of skills. Responding to the argument that quotas can be debilitating to women, Mr Dickson held the view that in an ideal world, people would be elected only because of their set of skills, adding that we do not live in an ideal world. Equal representation will not happen until girls and boys receive the same education and opportunities, and to reach such a result without a boost, such as quotas, is not easy. Although a change can only be real if it is systemic, and as such can be better achieved in the long-term through positive action measures, affirmative action measures such as quotas can have a quicker impact on gender equality globally. Accordingly, the Global Gender Gap Report 2017 of the World Economic Forum assessed the need for another 217 years to make up the differences between women and men in politics and employment, carrying on current terms. Also Anthony ZACHARZEWSKI, founder of the Democratic Society, argued from the audience that international standards can really produce a structural change, as it is the case with the standards set by the Council of Europe in the field of education. To this, Ms BJÖRBY added that today's culture is tomorrow's heritage.

### **Conclusion**

- ✓ Fight against “burden of child, elderly and house care” through concrete measures (day care centres, mentality shift...) to help women take part in political participation
- ✓ Engage women in what hinders them from engaging in political life before any project and work on including them through steering groups
- ✓ Fill the gap between empowering women and giving them real **power**: this goes through platforms for women to raise their voices
- ✓ Need for ‘affirmative action’ : policy that balances the disadvantage artificially



## Lab 13 – Women’s diversity: what are the interests of women of ethnic minorities and who represents them?

*Sponsored by the Council of Europe’s Roma and Travellers Team*

### **Moderator:**

**Ms Gwendolyn ALBERT**, Human Rights Activist, Researcher and Translator, Journalist at Romea.cz in the Czech Republic

### **Lego Facilitators:**

**Mr Michel CLOOSTERMAN**, Business coach

**Ms Veronica FOUBERT**, LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® certified facilitator

**Mr Kåre Bach KRISTIANSEN**, Managing Partner in Trivium

### **Discussant:**

**Ms Ismeta DERVOZ**, former member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Journalist, Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Mr Orhan GALJUS**, Chair, EBU Roma Task Force Group and Chief Executive Officer of Radio Patrín, the Netherlands

## The lab in brief

**Concept:** Balanced participation and representation of women and men in public and political life, in public institutions, and among elected officials can be achieved if men feel engaged and work side by side with women in denouncing and breaking harmful cultural norms and practices.

This Lab used the innovative LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® method to explore the unconscious assumptions that influence the behaviour of men and women by identifying those **cultural norms and practices** as well as institutional, structural and legal barriers that hinder equal political participation of women of ethnic minority backgrounds, including from Roma and Traveller communities.

## Key Premises

Issues surrounding minority representation and participation in political life continue to prompt questions about **accommodating diversity in democratic societies**. **Socially marginalised people such as the Roma, encounter a series of social barriers and prejudices which severely impede on their capacity to effectively participate in public life. The inability to access and exercise the right to participation and to effective representation further embeds marginalisation.**

Repeated evidence has shown that **Roma** and particularly young Roma women **are largely absent from local and national political participation and decision-making processes**. This invisibility ultimately undermines the potential for political participation, the dynamics needed to alter the crippling factors of marginalisation.

While the principle of equality requires protection against discrimination, it also necessitates proactive policies and special measures to ensure equality of opportunity and outcomes for all minority women.



## Driving questions for the Lab

- *In the world's electoral democracies, the policies used for women differ systematically from those used for minorities. So, how are minority women represented?*
- *Who represents Roma and Traveller women?*
- *Is it enough to give people formal equalities or whether we need to address the structural barriers which prevent minority groups from making full use of their equal rights?*
- *Should Roma women be content with physical presence in a parliament or a consultative body, based on the assumption that representation is therefore meaningful, authentic, or even effective? Or should the politics of ideas suffice in which the interests, needs and policy preferences of Roma women are listened to, debated and decided upon?*

## Methodological Approach of the Lab

Since innovation is a good stimulus to change thinking, the LAB has adopted a novel approach that actively engages participants to re-think, re-evaluate and *deconstruct* those 'norms' which hinder equal political participation of women of ethnic minority backgrounds in an attempt to *construct* possible solutions to the emerging issues.

The Lab was divided into 3 key stages of activities:

### 1. Personal testimonies

*Three key stimulus speakers introduced participants to the issues at hand. Gwendolyn ALBERT, Human rights activist, researcher and translator from the Czech Republic outlined **what it is like to be a Roma and Traveller woman in Europe today and the daily challenges faced both in their marginalised communities and in their wider society.** There seems to be a continuum of their gender and culture expectations. They usually find it difficult to negotiate their place in their communities and in wider society. Ismeta DERVOZ, former member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe representing Bosnia and Herzegovina, stressed that women in general should advocate for minority women involvement while **politicians have the responsibility to ensure marginalised women political voice and representation.** Ensuring political participation and representation is the means to improve the situation of minority women. This is particularly important in the Balkan Region. Orhan GALJUS, Chair of EBU Roma Task Force Group and CEO of Radio PatrIn from the Netherlands presented his thoughts as a **son and grandson of Roma women who as change makers in their communities influenced his life path as a male Roma.***

### 2. LEGO® SERIOS PLAY® workshop

48 Participants divided into 8 groups of 6 people were involved in the active participation workshop led by expert Kåre BACH KRISTIANSEN who facilitated the activities. Participants were asked to do a series of activities using a professionally designed Lego blocks kit. The aim was to use the blocks to **reconstruct, through visual representation, those social norms which create the barriers for minority women to access their right to full political and public participation.** In essence, this would assist participants to **'unleash' their full thinking capacities to understand and rethink them and discuss them with their group partners.** The approach is based on the assumption that innovative solutions are usually the product of alternate thinking of the issues and the knowledge we already possess.

Activities included:

- **Challenge and deconstruct** where participants constructed their towers representative of the social norms and barriers of minority women accessing political representation. **It was noted that despite the use of identical building blocks, every representation was unique.** Every tower was built to withstand any threat. There was commitment. The activity helped to reiterate that it is important to keenly identify the key issues at hand, engage key stakeholders and assure commitment in any endeavour to find solutions.
- **Construct and share** where participants **shared their representation models with their group partners of their ‘nightmare influencer’- the one that keeps the harmful cultural norms or practices alive.** Guiding questions included: How do they exercise their influence? What kind of institutional, structural and legal barriers do they support? Why are they powerful? How are they anchored? What does it feel like when you are exposed to the influencer?
- **Reconstruct for solutions** where participants **constructed a model that tells the story of the action or solution that will increase the political participation and representation of minority women and in particular Roma women.** Guiding questions included: What are the key elements in the action/solution? How can it be exercised? Who can assist? What is driving this change? What is the passion and commitment behind the action/solution?

#### **Proposed solutions**

- Renewed laws, policies, and procedures that promote gender equality and guaranteed access to all women send positive messages about their role and place in society;
- Key stakeholders in action for women should be instigated by women in positions of power;
- Men should be part of the breaking of the habitual thinking regarding women in political life;
- Although the ultimate goal is to see equal national and European level representation of minority women in political flora, key actions would need to start at local level and work their way up to higher levels of representation.

### **3. Retelling the story**

Participants in plenary chose one representative model from their group, retold the proposed actions and linked the models to possible group solutions. These 8 different models are then joined together to construct a concerted action for possible solutions. The activity highlighted the strength of commitment, collaboration and coordinated actions amongst those with vested interest when the focus is on the solution rather than on the why we need a solution!

#### **Key LAB Messages**

This activity brought forward some important messages:

- “When given the opportunity, different solutions and ideas are given to the problems and barriers identified “
- “When there is ownership of the issue, then there is commitment”

- “It is important to maximise engagement from all those who have vested interest”
- “Through discussion, there will always be innovation...but discussions need to focus on the issue...not on why the issue occurs”
- “Cultural norms that create the barriers need to be understood “
- *“No Change can happen without an action!”*
- The absence of man in the struggle for gender equality was noted even during the LAB activity. Although it was stressed that the participation of men in women accessing their rights in political participation plays a significant role
- Our democracy is in need of a strong, coordinated feminist movement that could to some degree mitigate the lack of party effectiveness in increasing women’s political participation

## Roundtable 1 – Artificial Intelligence and gender (in-)equality

*Sponsored by the Council of Europe's Directorate of Information Society and Action against crime, Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law*

### **Moderator:**

**Mr Yannick MENECEUR**, Directorate of Information Society and Action against crime, Council of Europe

### **Speakers:**

**Ms Antoinette ROUVROY**, Permanent Research Associate, University of Namur, Belgium

**Ms Chiara TOMASI**, Public Policy and Government Relations Analyst, Google

**Mr Frederik ZUIDERVEEN BORGESIU**S, Researcher at LTS Law, Science, Technology & Society, VUB Free University of Brussels, Belgium

### The roundtable in brief

Artificial intelligence (AI) is now omnipresent in our lives: smartphones, Internet commerce, (almost) autonomous vehicles and suggestions for films or series. We would gladly lend it demiurgic power and extraordinary capacities when in reality they are only tools allowing a mathematical and statistical representation of a given environment. And if we have been promised a human-like AI for 20 years since the 1950s, researchers such as Yann LeCun, an AI expert at Facebook and a pioneer in deep learning, point out that the current technologies in question (machine learning) do not prefigure the general AI fantasised by Alan Turing and John Mc Carthy and even less a Terminator.

In this context mixing exaltation, very strong economic investments and misunderstandings about the very definition of AI, a critical discourse takes shape and really raises good questions: Cathy O'Neil alerted us to the power of massive destruction of mathematics, in France Eric Sadin, philosopher, denounces a new regime of truth resulting from AI, non-critical because it is based on statistical and probabilistic models. The common feature of this criticism is to alert us to the slow shift from a society based on law to a society regulated by equations, supposedly able to correct all evils.

This ambiguity of AI is very substantially evident in the field of discrimination. On the one hand, because it would be fed with already biased data on inequalities in our society, these tools would only reinforce discrimination. If we look at the COMPAS tool in the United States, which is supposed to predict the dangerousness of individuals, it is difficult not to see a resurgence of the worst deterministic policies in criminal science since African-American populations are overwhelmed as dangerous. On the other hand, these same tools are able to reveal in large data sets the inequalities in treatment between different types of population: glass ceiling for women's access to management positions, wage differences, access to justice are all subjects already revealed and addressed by traditional statistical approaches. Couldn't the power of AI give us a mirror in "high definition"? Could we expect them to integrate corrective measures?

### What happened?

#### **AI's potential and limitation.**

It appeared that there is a substantial difference between the ways the human brain and a machine address the same issues. Humans consider the rationale behind actions, but machines only see raw data and signals. Based on the data provided, machines creates predictions and do not consider reasons

behind the result. Mr Zuiderveen Borgesius emphasised that machines are not biased, but the data that is put into the machine may be biased and this results in a situation where the result is biased as well. He noted that computers can only find correlations in data, but they cannot see any deficiencies, including bias, in the data they are using. Ms Tomasi added that we should not rely on machines to solve our problems. Machines can solve some issues and problems better than humans, but machines do not understand things like context or irony, and this limits possible applications of AI. The background and biases of the people creating the machine also have an impact on the result.

### **How to correct bias in data?**

Ms Tomasi noted that Google tries to embed ethics in all of their products, and that ethical aspects are considered already during the development process. Mr Zuiderveen Borgesius also stated that testing the system before deployment may help to uncover biases embedded in the system. He noted that most scandals concerning AI and bias have been uncovered by journalists and computer scientists, and that one can find warning signs of bias just by looking at the data fed into the system and at the conclusions the machine makes based on that data.

### **A society governed by AI?**

Ms Rouvroy stated that we should be afraid of our own laziness and that we should face difficult questions on our own. She noted that when humans make decisions, the decisions can be contested, but this is not the case when it comes to machines. When decisions made by a machine are calculations based on old biased data, it is difficult to contest the decision. The issue raised by Ms Rouvroy was that we are unwilling to govern ourselves. Ms Tomasi noted that we need to remember that AI is biased, and that we should consider if using AI will add bias in our society, or if we are even aware of this bias. She continued by stating that AI can be a useful tool but there needs to be a correct application of it. Ms Rouvroy added that even an unbiased algorithm is problematic and is impossible to create due to the nature of machine learning. Mr Zuiderveen Borgesius added that if algorithms are tested against bias, this can be addressed and the usage of the said algorithm can be stopped if bias cannot be corrected.

### **AI to face data bias?**

Ms Rouvroy admitted it could be useful to try, but repeated that AI does not work like the human brain does. She emphasised that we need to 'clean' the data that AI uses from bias, and noted that we should not focus only on the algorithm. Data is only the result of facts, and we should focus on the causes of bias in data. She added that society cannot be fixed by machines, and that we need to find appropriate areas of application for algorithms and ensure that their application is also in conformity with the law. Ms Tomasi noted that algorithms cannot be tested just once, but they need to be constantly tested. We should be cautious in using just one tool to test algorithms. Mr Zuiderveen Borgesius considered that AI can be used to help discover bias in other AI systems and in people too. Computer systems can be used to flag bias, but it would be difficult to make such computer systems transparent for scrutiny.

## Conclusion

- ✓ AI, as currently understood, mainly means machine learning and algorithms. Machine learning is sourced by previously collected data and if this data is biased the results of machine processing are also biased. This can have a discriminatory impact when the results of the machine are implemented
- ✓ We should not expect AI to fix all issues in our society
- ✓ As a way of addressing the situation, we could try to improve the quality of data used by the machines to prevent bias. AI could also be used to reveal bias in other AI systems and in ourselves, and in this way AI could help us combat the bias in our society
- ✓ In terms of recommendations for the future, the speakers' opinions were divided. As regards the need for new laws to govern AI, on the one hand we already have rules that apply to AI. On the other hand, new rules and laws may be necessary and already existing rules may need adjustment. We need to decide in which way, and to what extent, we want AI to affect our society.

## Roundtable 2 – Do more films by women mean more women’s films?

*Sponsored by Eurimages*

### **Moderator:**

**Ms Francine RAVENEY**, Project Manager Eurimages specialising in gender equality and Head of PR (founder and former director) for the European Women’s Audiovisual Network, Council of Europe

### **Speakers:**

**Ms Anca DAMIAN**, director, writer, producer, Romania

**Ms Lina KAMINSKAITĖ-JANČORIENĖ**, cinema and media historian, researcher, NGO Meno Avilys, Lithuania

**Ms Anna SERNER**, Chief Executive Office of the Swedish Film Institute, Sweden

**Ms Marianne SLOT**, film producer, Denmark and France

### The roundtable in brief

All four panellists provided examples demonstrating the difficulties encountered by women working both in front of and behind the camera. This begins with the erasure from the canon of the work of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century women pioneers of cinema, thus depriving succeeding generations of role models, and continues up to the present day, with women filmmakers and professionals tending to be confined to lower cost, less prestigious projects, and women’s acting careers limited by age and perceived capacity to draw an audience. Films that reach wide audiences tend to be more costly and are rarely directed by a woman or have a principally female cast. As a result, women apprehend society through the gaze of men. This situation arises because the power structures at this level are dominated by male decision-makers who perceive female directors and women’s films generally as inherently more risky and this perception is echoed by distributors (companies that make the films available for cinema screening and promote them) who believe that films with female characters do not attract audiences. Finally, notions of quality in film are societal constructs which involve conscious or indeed unconscious biases that can work against women professionals in the film industry.

### What happened?

#### **Addressing imbalances in the power and decision-making structures within the film industry.**

Public institutions play an important role in financing film production in many countries world-wide and should aim for parity in the composition of decision-making and selection committees, but also in governance structures. Quotas in the gender distribution of film funding can be put in place (or can be used as a threat!) but continuously monitored targets have proved easier to implement. Implementing change in the private sector which is instrumental in the production of big budget, high impact films is more difficult, but awareness can be raised by civil society groups (networking groups were mentioned specifically) and change can also come from the regulatory environment (for example general quotas for female company directors). Gendered research should be fostered, as where this has been undertaken, it can often be demonstrated that women filmmakers do not represent an economic risk, but instead bring new audiences and ensure creative renewal. The impact of unconscious bias in decision-making should be acknowledged and training should be systematically proposed to help overcome this. Finally, more objective and broader criteria for the measurement of “quality” in film should be implemented, focussing for example on the relevance of the story for the audience, originality and filmmaking craft, with less importance placed on the critical reputation of the director.

## Conclusion

- ✓ As a popular medium, film has high impact and plays an important role in shaping perceptions in society. Though the film industry around the world has begun to address questions of gender, research has shown that women filmmakers tend to be excluded from making the high budget films that reach the widest audiences. As a result, only one side of the human story is told.
- ✓ Correcting imbalances in power and decision-making structures in the industry, moving away from unconscious constructs of expected quality towards more objective and broader definitions and challenging with data the probably erroneous perception that women's films involve more risk are three of the main areas for action identified.
- ✓ Introduce quotas in the gender distribution of film funding or alternatively, set and continuously monitor gender distribution targets
- ✓ Foster gendered research in order to provide evidence that women filmmakers can bring new audiences and ensure creative renewal, hence dispelling the notion that they would represent an economic risk.



## Roundtable 3 – Migrant women: promoting successful integration and empowerment

*Sponsored by the Network of the Council of Europe's Schools of Political Studies*

### **Moderator:**

**Ms Despina SYRRI**, Director, Civic School of Political Studies in Greece and President of Symβiosis, Thessaloniki

### **Speakers:**

**Ms Chadia ARAB**, CNRS Research Fellow, University of Angers, France

**Ms Marcelle BUGRE**, Project Development Manager with the Foundation for Shelter and Support to Migrants, Malta

**Ms DANKA PETROVIĆ MATANOVIĆ**, International co-operation and EU Integration Advisor, Ministry of Interior of Montenegro; Alumna of the Council of Europe's School of Political Studies in Montenegro

### The roundtable in brief

The round table brought together three speakers from very different professional backgrounds (government, academic and civil society). The discussion identified a number of elements that impact directly or indirectly the integration of migrant women and their empowerment.

Migration is a complex phenomenon with multiple consequences for women. The introduction of a gender perspective into migration policies is a relatively recent phenomenon. It is fully justified by the specific situation of migrant women as they are more exposed to the risk of violence.

### What happened?

Some **states have started to amend their legislation**, in particular the procedure for granting refugee status, as well as the conditions for receiving asylum seekers in order to adapt them to the needs of women and the risks they face in their migration journey. For example, Montenegro has set up specific reception and accommodation centres and follow-up for women seeking asylum. On the other hand, some states make no effort and offer migrant women only limited access to rights that thus contribute to their social exclusion.

The **gender perspective has also been introduced at the supranational level**, as is the case in the future Global Compact on Migration, which will be adopted in Morocco next December and will constitute an important instrument for global migration governance. This is also the case for Council of Europe instruments such as the Istanbul Convention (see Chapter VII).

**Participants were also confronted with a concrete example of an attempt to organise women's migration through an "ethical" management programme** for seasonal immigration between Morocco and Spain. This programme, which aims to combat illegal migration and meet the labour needs of strawberry producers in Spain, is aimed exclusively at women, mainly from rural areas, who have children. While the benefits of such programmes for women should not be underestimated (especially in terms of finances and empowerment), it is also important not to lose sight of the negative consequences they can have on women's lives (including the impact on the family unit left behind and the increased exposure to the risks of harassment or abuse on the ground).

The discussion also highlighted the importance of **taking into account the specific situation of each migrant woman to enable her integration or strengthen her empowerment**. Although they face the

same obstacles - partly linked to the entrenchment of discrimination in our societies - each migrant woman has her own journey and ambitions that must be duly taken into account. Civil society organisations have developed projects in this direction that have enabled women to achieve their full potential in their host society. One of the projects shared with the assistance is the "Women's Diner" project developed in Malta by the FSM association. These dinners were set up to bring migrant women together to share their stories and experiences. This initiative has been successful in facilitating communication and cohesion among these women.

## Conclusion

- ✓ Beyond the theme of the round table, participants stressed the need to develop a policy discourse on migration that would present the positive aspects of migration in simple and concrete terms
- ✓ Address the special needs of migrant women who are at particular risk of abuse and sexual violence, by for example, providing gender-sensitive asylum and migration policies, safe shelter and housing as well as preventive measures, close follow-up to prevent discrimination, abuse and violence

## Roundtable 4 – Has democracy failed women? New democratic practices and women’s participation

*Sponsored by the Incubator for Participatory Democracy*

**Moderator:**

**Mr Anthony ZACHARZEWSKI**, President, The Democratic Society

**Speakers:**

**Mr Robert BJARNASON**, member of the Incubator for Participatory Democracy, Iceland

**Mr Thomas GARRETT**, Secretary General, Community of Democracies, United States of America

**Ms Vanessa LISTON**, member of the Incubator for Participatory Democracy, Ireland

**Ms Petra DE SUTTER**, Chairperson, Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Belgium

### The roundtable in brief

The focus of the roundtable was the question whether democracy has failed women and if new approaches could make the path to a more gender-just world easier.

### What happened?

#### **Democracy: a constantly evolving concept.**

Recent years have, indeed, not shown the expected progress in terms of women’s representation in policy-making and, in some cases, women have even experienced a crackdown on their rights due to far right parties coming into power. On the other hand, the fact that the new generation of both men and women seem to be more sensitive to the topic of gender justice and more inclusive in their discourse and practice, as well as recent women-led movements fighting against the erosion of human rights, cast a better light on the future.

#### **Identifying barriers for women participation in political life.**

Work/life balance, cultural barriers and social norms were mentioned. The examples of how the burden of family and childcare is still mainly carried by women and of how the fact that something as simple as bringing a baby into the parliament seems to always make the headlines, were shared. This echoed the quote from the Spanish Minister of Justice, Dolores Delgado Garcia, who noted during the opening of the WFD, that “when a woman enters into politics it changes her life, but when many women enter politics it changes politics”.

#### **About “confidence” and entering the political arena.**

The idea is that women often need to be “pushed” by the party, as well as by families, civil society and the education sector to be convinced to run. In this regard, an interesting example was shared by Mr Garret who suggested as a very effective method of confidence-building, the idea of having joint trainings for women candidates and women campaign managers. In his experience, people would often join the training with the idea of becoming a campaign manager only to get the confidence to say they really wanted to be a candidate after some days. Attention to the system of quota should also be given in this regard, as, too often, they are felt only as a token and women are placed on unwinnable seats, or else they are placed very low on the list.

## **Across parties alliances to keep parties and institutions accountable.**

Mr Garret shared two powerful examples of this. The first is the case of the newly elected Congress of Mexico, which has passed from a 17% membership of women to 49% of the seats in the lower chamber and 51% in the Senate. This has come after 15 years of struggles of women bridging party lines to back each-others and bring lawsuits against parties for putting women on unwinnable seats or not-complying with the quota system. The second example comes from Afghanistan, where after the defeat of the Talibans many women were elected, only to find out, once they got in the parliament, that their microphone was often silenced when they would try to speak. In that situation as well, women from different parties, totally at odds on policy issues, would defend each other's rights to speak.

## **How to measure gender equality?**

The idea that the number of seats won by women in parliaments results in having their voices heard and having gender mainstreaming in policies, is in fact not correct. A participant from Philippines shared his experience about his country. Even if there have been already two female presidents and the country is scoring well in many international matrixes regarding women participation in politics, he argued that those women in power come from dynasties and very selective elites and cannot be representative of the entire spectrum. He underlined how, for example, in terms of reproductive health the country is falling behind.

## **Towards a more inclusive and deliberative system?**

Ms Liston shared her call for more discursive representation, which would allow for multiple discourses to be shared around an issue taking into account the multiple perspectives that are brought by different human beings and that could enhance our elective representation system. In this respect she quoted Amartya Sen's idea that "when we try to determine how justice can be advanced, there is a basic need for public reasoning, involving arguments coming from different quarters and divergent perspectives". She argued that a more understanding system would support us not only in advancing gender justice, but also in reasoning about how we deal with climate change or the economy.

## **Conclusion**

- ✓ Quotas are not enough, placement and sanctions for non-compliance are critical in reaching gender parity. At the same time, systematic lawsuit should be filed against parties that put women on unwinnable positions or do not have quota at all
- ✓ We need to focus on a more deliberative approach, creating spaces for entire range of stories, discourses, and perspectives to be shared and moving away from a bipolar approach of "for and against" of which men vs women is an example
- ✓ Attention should be paid to confidence-building measures and activities by parties, families, education sector, civil society
- ✓ Build alliances among women across parties to make parties and institutions accountable
- ✓ Encourage a diversity of voices and abandon the monolithic idea of "woman"

## Roundtable 5 – Taking action against violence against women and girls

*Sponsored by Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)*

### **Moderator:**

**Ms Salimata NDOYE**, Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, France

### **Speakers:**

**Ms Hortense LOUGUE**, Executive Director, Association D'appui et d'Eveil Pugsada (ADEP) Burkina Faso

**Ms Julienne LUSENGE**, Director, Fund for Congolese Women (FFC), Democratic Republic of Congo

**Ms Rabéa NACIRI**, Professor, member of the Consultative Council of the network "Women's learning Partnership" and of the Bureau of the Superior Moroccan Council for education, formation and scientific Democratic research, Democratic, Morocco

### The roundtable in brief

This Roundtable presented three African organisations and their actions and efforts in defending women from gender violence. One of the key points that emerged is that regardless of the geographic areas, violence against women is widely spread and unfortunately it is too often tolerated. These organisations are sending the message that if women get together, they can change society's perceptions and reverse the stigma, still dominating in many patriarchal societies, so that abused women will no longer be considered guilty of the violence they suffered.

### What happened?

#### Three countries, three common threads.

**In Morocco**, according to a Survey carried out in 2009, around 6 million women between 18-60 years old have been victims of physical violence. From the study, it emerged that domestic violence is underestimated for two main reasons. Firstly, women erroneously think that violence within the household is "normal" and that it is part of a married woman's life to accept that. Secondly, women are afraid of men's revenge and paybacks. In addition, the law is not on women's side, as often the aggressor is unpunished. This vicious circle discourages women to report assaults to the police, to the extent that only 3.6% of domestic violence has been reported to the competent authority.

**In Burkina Faso**, the Support and Awakening Association "Pugsada" aims at protecting women and girls. Among their goals, they aim to stop the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM), raising awareness on the physical and psychological consequences, and forced marriage. The association also welcomes girls who are victims of violence and have been repudiated by the family: through mediation, they foster dialogue and mutual understanding between girls and parents. However, despite the steps forward, girls and women are still facing gender violence in a rigid patriarchal society, where the scheme imposes women to stay at home and physical violence is accepted and tolerated to the point that it is no longer perceived as a crime against Human Rights.

**In Congo**, defined as the "rape capital" by the UN, every evening thousands of women flee war, violence and persecution. The Fund for Congolese Women welcomes and supports women offering a holistic service to sexual violence victims, providing psychological and medical assistance to prevent HIV and STDs. Furthermore, the organisation has decentralised tribunals in small villages sponsoring lawyers to

defend women against the perpetrators. This is an attempt to facilitate access to justice, criminalising violence while fighting against the silence, family oppression and the lack of justice.

## Conclusion

- ✓ Violence, in all its forms, sets limits to women's freedom with consequences in all aspects of women's public and personal lives. Violence is an alarm bell alerting that there is a dysfunction in the society. To heal, education has been proven to be a primary resource able to reshape the perceptions of the world we live in. In this landscape, women are not only victims but advocates who can change their stories and role in societies
- ✓ It is important to facilitate an access to justice and to criminalise violence: this means breaking taboos, speaking out and changing mentalities

## Roundtable 6 – National policy approaches to achieving gender equality

### **Moderator:**

**Ms Simona GRANATA-MENGHINI**, Deputy Secretary to the Secretariat of the Enlarged Agreement on Democracy through law (Venice Commission), Council of Europe

### **Speakers:**

**Mr Alan BOWMAN**, Minister-Counsellor and Deputy Head, Mission of Canada to the European Union and Permanent Observer of Canada to the Council of Europe

**Ms Lenita FREIDENVALL**, Special Adviser and Deputy Head for the Gender Equality Division at the Ministry for Health and Social Affairs, Sweden

**Ms Sopio JAPARIDZE**, Assistant to Prime Minister on Human Rights and Gender Equality Issues and Chair of the Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, Georgia

### The roundtable in brief

*“Gender equality is a human right, is a matter of democracy and a matter of rule of law”*

Gender equality remains a top agenda, nourishing the debate across (Sweden, Georgia) and beyond Europe (Canada). Despite the fact that gender is, mainly, a socially constructed norm and thus may be shaped differently from one country to the other, challenges remain common in the three main spheres of each state: society, economy and institutions.

### What happened?

#### **Low representation of women in leadership roles and high-ranking positions.**

Only 20% of persons working in large co-operations in Canada are women. In national parliaments, 26% of MPs in Canada and 15% of MPs in Georgia are women. Moreover, women continue to be paid less (27% in Canada) compared to men (gender pay gap) and a significant number of them work part-time (2/3 in Canada).

These challenges in advancing their careers go hand in hand with the fact that women still continue to be perceived and thus to be the main care-givers, being responsible for children’s upbringing. Despite the existence of the shared parental leave, the lack of a compulsory non-transferrable period of leave for fathers makes parental leave to be women’s first option.

Also, women still continue to experience high rates of gender-based violence.

#### **Fitting gender equality within national agendas.**

The existence or the absence of political will, the sharing of responsibilities on gender equality issues in the government structure (for Canada, it is more on the local/provinces level, for Sweden and Georgia it is on the national/government level) as well as the network of responsible multi-level authorities (agencies, parliament, standing bodies/committees etc.) and budget structure and allocation have been stressed as clear shaping factors on how we tackle these challenges.

On the top of that, the dynamics of the civil society and of cultural and religious norms should not be under-estimated as they can be proved to be important push back factors.

Significant steps have been made towards achieving gender equality through national policies:

In Canada, the current PM (“feminist in chief”) has really adopted a feminist approach in both domestic and international politics and for the first time, the 50/50 principle has been applied to the composition of the Cabinet. Also, the adoption of a more transparent approach for the appointment of members in boards and other high-ranking posts has increased the women’s participation, reaching now a total of

44%. Also, relevant strategies have been adopted to encourage women's careers in male-dominated areas such as enterprises and applied sciences. Moreover, in Georgia a compulsory training module on Gender Mainstreaming has been introduced for persons working in the public sector in order to make them more gender-sensitive. Nevertheless, the introduction of quotas to ensure higher and more balanced political participation of women does not always turn to be "a success story" as it depends on the electoral systems of each country (some more conducive than others).

Sweden seems to have played a pioneering role in reforming its parental leave scheme by adding each year, incrementally, more days in order to achieve an equal division between the two parents (90 days). Canada, which is inspired by Swedish policies, has introduced a non-transferable period of 5 weeks that cannot be transferred from one parent to the other.

Gender-budgeting has also been put forward as an effective means to address gender equality by all countries since it introduces a gender dimension in resources' allocation and activities' planning and budgeting.

In addition to that, all countries recognised the **need of a co-ordinated and well established multi-level network of institutions** (parliament, government, committees) and stakeholders (agencies, NGOs) for a more comprehensive gender equality policy more aligned with the international and European standards set by the Council of Europe and other organisations.

Regarding gender-based violence, Georgia has adapted its current legislative framework to be in line with the requirements of Istanbul Convention. Canada also adopted a National Strategy on Combating Violence against women and on supporting victims of violence. Sweden also underlined the fact that addressing masculinity can be part of the solution of the problem.

## Conclusion

- ✓ In brief, gender equality is not only a human right. It can also be part of the solution for many contemporary challenges that we face, key to sustainable development and to economic growth. It seems that interaction between legislation and minds is really strong on this issue. Change in mind sets and norms combined with education and awareness-raising can set ground for the required reforms, ensuring more inclusive societies where women can participate equally in all aspects of life



## Roundtable 7 – Feminist Investigative Journalism

*Sponsored by Open Democracy*

### **Moderator:**

**Ms Claire PROVOST**, editor of Open Democracy 50.50 (moderator/chair), Italy

### **Speakers:**

**Ms Maria SANZ DOMINGUEZ**, 50.50 women's rights & economic justice fellow, Paraguay

**Ms Lidia KURASINSKA**, freelance journalist covering Eastern Europe and the Balkans, Poland

**Ms Laila MALIK**, Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), Canada

**Ms Claudia TORRISI**, freelance journalist and 50.50 columnist, Italy

### The roundtable in brief

The best investigative journalism exposes and challenges abuses of power, in the public interest. So where are the investigative journalists tackling patriarchy, gender discrimination, and structural violence against women? We need much more of this kind of reporting around the world. And to do this, we must support more women, transgender and gender nonconforming journalists to develop their capacity and confidence to pursue such stories.

This roundtable presented the new fellowship programme for young writers at 50.50, the section of the independent media platform [openDemocracy.net](https://www.opendemocracy.net) that publishes critical commentary and in-depth reporting on gender, sexuality and social justice, worldwide.

### What happened?

#### 4 journalists, 4 experiences

**Lidia KURASINSKA** is a Freelance journalist covering Eastern Europe and the Balkans, based in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Her speech targeted the close proximity between the media and the political actors.

Media are, in a way, normalising the violence against women. The speaker revealed that in Eastern countries, the feminism and abortion are seen as a phenomenon characteristic to Western countries. If you fight for these rights, you are, obligatory paid by Western countries to promote these issues. The power of the ultraconservative lobbies is also due to the fact that they have transnational organisations, the feminist media should do the same to counter this effect. There is a global need to support feminist media financially and to encourage them to launch their initiatives.

**Laila MALIK** is working as Production Coordinator for the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) in Canada. The speaker pointed out that in the US a lot of media was interested by the #MeToo movement because it was seen as a scoop. Moreover, we can observe some improvements in the direction of feminist media, for example the New York Times created a special section on Gender Equality. Some media are trying to build relationship and to encourage feminist journalists to get involved (e.g. The Guardian).

**Maria SANZ DOMINGUEZ** is a 50.50 Women's Rights & Economic Justice fellow in Paraguay. She stated that it is very difficult to get fair information about transgender (LGBTI) as they are often discriminated and most people make fun of them. The new, progressive media promote women more than the traditional media, but in contrast to traditional media the latter often lack reliable sources of funding, thus sufficient economic sustainability. Defending women and LGBTI in media can also be dangerous.

For example, one reporter in Paraguay has been threatened for promoting the abortion, which is currently prohibited in Paraguay. Nevertheless, feminist media influence and inspire more and more women to take an action and fight for their rights.

**Claudia TORRISI** is a Freelance journalist and 50.50 Columnist in Italy. In her opinion, the #MeToo movement did not change anything in Italy. In Verona, the local council introduced propositions to avoid abortion; they use public funds to discourage women to abort. Many similar initiatives were proposed in other cities. The problem is that many people do not see what can happen if such propositions are accepted; the traditional media provide rather technical and biased expertise and opinion. There is a need for feminist media in Italy but there is currently none.

## Conclusion

- ✓ Male-centred self-regulatory codes and funding need to be challenged so as to end male-dominated media and industries
- ✓ There is a need for more women and LGBTI people represented in newsrooms in the media to tackle these issues
- ✓ There is a need to encourage more journalists to investigate on women and LGBTI related subjects and to give them more financial support in order to ensure the freedom of speech and expression
- ✓ Creating transnational media could be a way to have a general overview of the situation leading to more transparent information for citizens

## Roundtable 8 – Faith and Feminism – Can women gain greater power in religious communities?

### **Moderator:**

**Mr Andrew BRADLEY**, Director, Office of International IDEA to the EU

### **Speakers:**

**Karen ENGEL**, founder and director of Tacheles Styria, fellow of the Paideia Institute of Jewish Studies in Stockholm

**Ms Suriani KEMPE**, Musawah Programme Manager, Malaysia

**Ms Hajnalka JUHASZ**, member of the Hungarian PACE delegation and politician of the Christian Democratic Party

**Ms Zuzanna RADZIK**, Theologian and author, Warsaw, Poland

NB: This Roundtable included an initiative from our Open Call: “Musawah”

### The roundtable in brief

Can women gain greater power in religious communities? Or even, can women afford not to use religion as a ground to reach gender equality? These were the main questions discussed during the roundtable on faith and feminism.

### What happened?

#### **Catholics**

Women in the Catholic community face a lack of opportunities and rights as they cannot be ordained, and because, historically, they have been given a precise role in society, namely that of bearing children and fulfilling their “natural” role of mothers. In order for this to change, women need to be protected by the church and sustained in their claims that family duties and a professional career can and should complement each other. A drastic change in the hierarchy of religious institutions has to follow and rooted traditions have to undergo a cultural switch that enables women to counter figures that until now have been considered undisputable in the religious environment.

#### **Jewish**

In the Jewish community, religion has always been male-driven, as storytellers were men and, despite women being present and spreading the word throughout history, written documents did not report them, tuning down or even fading their crucial role in the religious discourse. More recently, women have made some important gains in terms of equality in Judaism, for since 1935 they are entitled to serve as rabbis – in most streams of Judaism – and many of them are leaders of communities. It is only fair that women hold a leading duty in their communities, as, among others, they have been teaching men how to become rabbis themselves.

#### **Muslim**

Suriani Kempe mentioned similar concerns in the Muslim world. As programme manager of Musawah, a global movement for equality and justice in the Muslim family, Ms Kempe exposed the difficult path ahead trying to stop cruelty and violence against women perpetrated in the name of Islam. The patriarchal interpretation of God’s law has been taught as evident and irrefutable ever since, and any individual attempting to undermine it has been labelled as belonging to Westernized elites, as being anti-Sharia, as deviating from faith and, ultimately, as being anti-Islam. It was in this context that Musawah, which means equality in Arabic, was created. Through the work of more than 250 activists stemming from 47 different countries, Musawah seeks to offer an inclusive and holistic approach of

engaging with religion, as the latter is considered to be key to the achievement of gender equality in Muslim communities. Islam should be experienced as a source of liberation and empowerment rather than suppression, and should be widely agreed as being compatible with gender equality. Through a constructive dialogue, Musawah seeks to foster equality, rights and justice for Muslim women. Despite the reluctance of women to engage with religion actively, as it has always been experienced as a patriarchal construct, Ms Kempe underlines how ignoring religion is irresponsible and self-defeating. Thus, Muslim women are invited to reclaim Islam and the Koran for themselves, not accepting to have to choose between being a feminist and being Muslim, but rather reconciling religion and women/human rights. This shall serve as an attempt not to be silenced and cornered but to voice women's need and willingness to stand on the same ground as Muslim men.

## Conclusion

- ✓ In order for women to gain further power in religious communities, education is the key: speakers advise women to thoroughly read and understand the religious texts, being able to interpret them personally rather than through the pre-imposed patriarchal perspective.
- ✓ The essence of religious texts, in fact, should be grasped, interpreted and translated as to become relatable to today's world and today's challenges. It is important to stress the possibility and need to change the liturgy and deviate for the exclusive masculine interpretation of the word of God
- ✓ Despite the different religious contexts presented during the roundtable, all panellists agreed that women are the key of change as they are essential to the advancement of gender equality in religion. Yet, extensive change cannot happen unless men are held accountable and authorities and institutions rectify the discriminating practices (and male-only interpretations of sacred texts) rooted in the religious communities around the world