

**Joint meeting of the Sub-Committee on Gender Equality and the
Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence
Berlin, 12 May 2016**

OPENING SESSION

Ms Maria Edera Spadoni:

Please be seated, we will now start our meeting. I am pleased to announce that the first part of the meeting will be broadcast live on the Bundestag website.

Distinguished guests,
Dear colleagues,
Dear participants,

Welcome to the joint meeting of the Sub-Committee on Gender Equality and the Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence.

On behalf of both the Sub-Committee and the Network, I would like to thank the Bundestag to welcome us today and also our colleague Ms Mechthild Rawert for her initiative to organise this joint meeting, and the whole German delegation for their wonderful support.

This meeting gives us an opportunity to raise awareness on the issue of violence against women; but also to shine a spotlight on good practices in Council of Europe member States in the field of gender equality.

The aim, of course, is for each of us to learn something new and inspiring, and to bring it back home to our national parliaments.

Draft agenda

Before we start, I would like to ask members: can we adopt the agenda?

[...]

The agenda is adopted. Thank you.

After this quick formality, I can now give the floor to Ms Ulla Schmidt, Vice-President of the Bundestag. Ms Schmidt, thank you very much for being with us today, it is a pleasure and an honour. Your participation is also a testimony of the importance that this parliament attaches to gender equality and the fight on violence against women. Mr Schmidt, the floor is yours.

[...]

Thank you very much Ms Schmidt for your speech.

Now I would like to give the floor to our colleague Ms Rawert.

Ms Rawert, you have the floor.

[...]

Thank you Ms Rawert.

Last but not least, Ms Sahiba Gafarova, General Rapporteur on violence against women of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and Political coordinator of the Network Women Free from Violence.

Ms Gafarova, the floor is yours.

[...]

Thank you Ms Gafarova.

Ms Sahiba GAFAROVA
General Rapporteur of the Parliamentary Assembly of the
Council of Europe on violence against women

Opening speech

Distinguished guests,
Dear colleagues,
Dear participants,

I must say that in my capacity of General Rapporteur on Violence against women I am honored and pleased to be here with you today to represent the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and to be given the floor to put light on the issue of violence against women.

Violence against women is still widespread and statistics are alarming. Thousands of women are killed every year and the vast majority of perpetrators escape conviction.

The Istanbul Convention

In August 2014 the Istanbul Convention entered into force, as a result of a collective effort of parliaments, governmental authorities and non-governmental organisations. Since then, other countries have ratified and the monitoring mechanism, the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (known as GREVIO) has been set up.

I am very pleased that Ms Rosa Logar, First Vice-President of the GREVIO, is with us today.

I believe that, despite its young age, the Istanbul Convention has already set a record: no other treaty has been defined in so many ways

and praised for so many reasons.

The most common words to describe it are: unique, unprecedented, innovative, comprehensive, far-reaching, landmark and gold standard.

I must say this convention is a light in the darkness. The Istanbul Convention is the first binding instrument which explicitly recognises violence against women as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination.

Furthermore, the Istanbul Convention can be applied to all victims of domestic violence, irrespective of their gender.

It criminalises a whole series of acts, including forced marriage, stalking or sexual harassment.

It focuses attention on the victims of violence.

History shows that positive change often followed signatures of international human rights treaties.

This convention does make a difference.

The role of parliaments

Ladies and gentlemen,

In this common fight against violence, parliamentarians have a great role to play.

It is indeed our shared responsibility to fill in the gaps between promises made on paper and the reality of daily life.

In Article 70 of the Istanbul Convention, and for the first time in a Council of Europe treaty, the role of parliaments and of the Parliamentary Assembly in monitoring the implementation of this convention is expressly recognised.

But on a practical level, what does this really mean? How can parliaments participate in an efficient manner in the monitoring of the Convention and ensure that it is effectively implemented?

First of all, parliaments hold a huge responsibility as they intervene in the ratification process of international conventions. They also participate closely in monitoring the implementation of these conventions.

Within their mandate, parliamentarians can for instance:

- adopt legislation to ensure that their national legal order is consistent with the provisions of the Istanbul Convention;
- make sure, through the vote of the budget, that sufficient resources are allocated to prevention and assistance programmes for victims of violence;
- and question the competent authorities about the different measures that are taken at national level to respect international obligations.

I would also like to stress that the partnerships between women parliamentarians from across the political spectrum but also between men and women parliamentarians need to be reinforced.

It can also be effective to involve parliamentary committees which would be primarily responsible in ensuring their governments do respect their international obligations.

The role of parliamentarians as you can see is indeed crucial. Unfortunately, too often parliamentarians do not know about the content of these treaties and do not get involved in their implementation. In the majority of cases, parliaments are not involved in the drafting of reports concerning their implementation and governments do not always transmit reports and recommendations set up by monitoring mechanisms.

***Raising awareness on the issue of violence against women:
the role of the Network***

The role of parliamentarians in countering violence against women has a wide scope, and certainly demands more action in the area of awareness-raising.

As political coordinator, I would like to say a few words about the Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence.

This Network is composed of parliamentarians coming from the 47 member states of the Council of Europe and also parliamentarians from Observer States and partners for democracy, engaged in combatting violence against women at national level.

Today, we have the pleasure to welcome our new member from Jordan, Ms Reem Abu Dalbough and also Ms El Ouafi from Morocco.

Network members work as Ambassadors of the Istanbul Convention in their national parliaments, by raising questions to relevant Ministers, introducing bills and legislative initiatives, speeding up signature and ratification.

They share information on legislation and policies in their respective countries.

In order to raise awareness among parliamentarians the Network organises, with the help of these ambassadors, parliamentary seminars and regional conferences on the Istanbul Convention in national parliaments.

These events have proven to be very efficient in:

- increasing the number of signatures and ratifications of the Istanbul Convention by member states by mobilising directly national

parliamentarians

- ensuring visibility to the issue of violence against women

The next step is to improve the implementation of the Istanbul Convention by increasing awareness and capacities of national parliamentarians to monitor it.

The role of NGOs

As we have many NGOs represented today, I would also like to acknowledge their work and perseverance.

We, parliamentarians, rely on your expertise when examining the ratification or implementation of the convention in national parliaments.

For you to continue to support women victims of violence, we, parliamentarians, need to advocate to ensure that you receive adequate funding for prevention measures and assistance and protection services for victims of all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Istanbul Convention promotes a vision of society. It is a project for the society we want, in which violence against women is no longer justified, forgiven, or minimised.

To date, 21 countries have ratified the Convention. I really hope that Germany will soon follow this path. This would be a strong signal for German women who are victims of violence and in need of protection.

Thank you for your attention.

Ms Spadoni

Thank you, Ms Gafarova, for the overview you gave us not only about the Istanbul Convention in itself, but also about the role that the various stakeholders, in particular parliamentarians and the civil society, can play. Like you, Ms Gafarova, I hope that the German parliament will ratify the Convention soon. And I hope that our presence here today will contribute at least a little to achieving this goal.

And now Ms Gafarova, I leave you the chair for first session on the Istanbul Convention.

SESSION 1 Istanbul Convention – Germany on the way to ratification

Ms Sahiba GAFAROVA

Thank you Ms Spadoni. This first session is devoted to both the Istanbul Convention and the current situation in Germany with regards to the ratification of this instrument.

To take part in this discussion, I am pleased to welcome:

- Mr Christian Lange, Parliamentary State Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection;
- Ms Rosa Logar, First Vice-President, the Group of Experts on Action against violence against women and domestic violence (known as GREVIO);
- Dr. Petra Follmar-Otto, head of the Unit “Human rights policies Germany/Europe” at the German Institute for Human rights.

Thank you very much for being with us today.
Mr Lange, the floor is yours.

[...]

Thank you Mr Lange.

Our next speaker is Ms Rosa Logar. Ms Logar has participated in the drafting of the Istanbul Convention, has cooperated with the Network on several occasions and is now representing as First Vice-President, the Group of Experts on Action against violence against women and domestic violence.

Ms Logar, you have the floor.

[...]

Thank you Ms Logar.

Now I would like to introduce our last speaker, Dr. Petra Follmar-Otto. Ms Follmar-Otto is the head of the Unit “Human rights policies Germany/Europe” at the German Institute for Human rights.

Ms Follmar-Otto, the floor is yours.

[...]

Thank you Ms Follmar-Otto.

I will now open the floor for the debate. Is there comment on the presentations? Who wishes to ask the first question?

[...]

Thank you once again to all our speakers for their valuable contributions today.

I suggest that we take a 15 minutes coffee break. We will start at 11.30.

SESSION 2 Aligning legislation with the Istanbul Convention: national perspectives

Chaired by Ms Mechthild Rawert.

SESSION 3 Best practices on Gender Equality

Ms Spadoni (moderator):

Dear colleagues and distinguished guests, welcome to this second part of our meeting. Until now we have discussed of violence against women specifically. Now, we have the opportunity to work on gender equality, under different angles, by sharing best practices. This will be, I hope, an effective method to find new ways of promoting gender equality, and take them back with us in our respective parliaments.

This does not mean that the other main focus of this meeting, the fight on violence against women, will disappear from our view. We all know that violence against women does not happen by chance. In fact, gender-based violence stems from a cultural climate of gender inequality and from unequal power relations between women and men.

I am convinced, to mention only one significant example, that the image of women in the media contributes to creating this unhealthy cultural climate. Personally, I will encourage the Assembly to work on this relationship between the image of women and gender-based violence.

In any case, this afternoon we will deal with a variety of subjects, thanks to our guest speakers, and also of course with the contribution of all the members who will take the floor.

I welcome our two guests, Ms Elke Ferner, Parliamentary State Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Family, Senior Citizens, Women

and Youth, and Ms Hannelore Buls, President of the National Council of German Women's Organisations.

Ms Ferner, we look forward to learning more from you about the policies carried out by the German authorities to promote gender equality. The floor is yours.

...

Thank you Ms Ferner. I suggest that we continue with the next presentation and then open the floor for discussion.

Ms Buls, could you tell us more about your organisation? We would also like to hear from you some examples of good practices from Germany as regards gender equality. Ms Buls, you have the floor.

...

Thank you Ms Buls.

Is there any comment from our members on these two interesting presentations? Any question for our guests? The floor is open.

...

....

Ms Ferner / Ms Buls, would you like to reply?

...

Thank you.

I will now invite my colleagues:

- Ms Elena Centemero, member of the Parliament of Italy
- Ms Françoise Hetto-Gaasch, member of the Parliament of Luxembourg

- Ms Josette Durrieu, member of the French National Assembly

to give an overview of the situation with regards to gender equality in their respective countries.

Ms Centemero, the floor is yours.

[...]

Thank you.

Our next speaker is Ms Françoise Hetto Gaasch, member of the Parliament of Luxembourg.

Ms Hetto-Gaasch, you have the floor.

[...]

Thank you

Our last speaker is Ms Josette Durrieu, member of the French National Assembly.

Ms Durrieu, you have the floor.

[...]

Thank you Ms Durrieu.

I will now open the floor for discussion. Any questions/ comments for our guests?

[...]

Thank you very much to our guests for their presentations.

Dear colleagues, we are reaching the end of our meeting, but there is still a number of activities in view. This afternoon we can choose to visit a refugee shelter for women, or a larger refugee shelter.

This evening, at 19.30, we will have a cruise on the waterways across the center of Berlin, and dinner will be served on board. This will be an excellent opportunity to see Berlin from a beautiful angle, but also to continue our discussions and get to know each other better.

Tomorrow morning, two visits are in the programme. The first one, from 9 to 11 am, will be to the office of LARA, a project on combating violence against women. Then, from 11am to 1pm, we will visit the Domestic interpersonal violence center of the Charité University of Medicine of Berlin.

I remind you that transportation for both visits will be provided from the Hotel Steigenberger.

I thank you all for your participation. The meeting is closed.