

Conference of European Churches
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece
School of Theology

SUMMER SCHOOL ON HUMAN RIGHTS:
“STAND UP FOR WOMEN’S AND CHILDREN’S RIGHTS”
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**“Women’s rights and Gender Equality as seen by the Council of Europe”
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I thank our hosts and organisers for their invitation and perfect arrangements. They have chosen a crucial topic. After brilliant communications, we see that the theme of this summer school is in the spotlight.

The progress of our societies has to go through the equality between women and men, in law, in fact. It is a requirement of justice, it a democratic imperative.

As you all perfectly know, the Council of Europe is the oldest European institution.

- 1. 47 countries** of the European continent are members of the Council of Europe; it accepts Belarus
- 2. It was founded on** May 5, 1949 by the London Treaty. The Council of Europe is located in Strasbourg, covering more than eight hundred million citizens from Russia to Italy.

Its missions are mainly to implement human rights, democracy and the awareness of the European ideal to escape war.

- *To defend human rights and the rule of law*
- *To seek solution to social problems*
- *To consolidate democratic stability in Europe*

- *To promote awareness and enhancement, be active in different networks of the cultural identity of Europe and its diversity*

European and international treaties are neutral relative to religions which had allowed some advanced for women's rights link their universalities

3. The 4 pillars of the Council of Europe are:

- The Committee of Ministers, the instance of the Council Decision, chaired by Estonia
- The Parliamentary Assembly whose members are appointed by national parliaments
- PACE elected the Secretary General, Mr Thorbjørn Jagland of Norway who has the overall responsibility for the strategic management of CoE
- PACE elected the Commissioner for Human Rights, an independent and impartial non-judicial institution, 1 April 2012, [Nils Muižnieks](#), Latvia
- Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, a consultative body representing around 200 000 local communities
- Conference of INGOs, with CEC as a member

For the protection of human rights and their promotion to implement democracy, the main role of the Council of Europe, are institutions such as:

- The European Court of Human Rights
- Effectiveness of the Human Rights Convention system at national and European level
- As an Intergovernmental Cooperation Organisation, CoE has created a common judicial area based on more than 200 treaties. Some have monitoring mechanisms to assess how states respect them and encourage them to address their failures
- Specific committees, commissions, observatories and institutes are working on various topics: equality, violence, refugees, asylum, terrorism, freedom, cybercrime, education, data protection, cultural, citizenship, intercultural, youth, audio-visual, financial crime, drugs, ethics, corruption, biodiversity, social cohesion, intercultural dialogue North-South, sport, non-hate speech movement, political studies, electoral assistance, natural catastrophes, medias, pharmacopoeia, etc.

And in the background, women and men of all countries are working together, getting know each other, advancing peace, tolerance and mutual respect.

4. Why gender main-streaming?

- Women and men are still in different situations:
 - In most European countries, women's wages are lower than men's: in the European Union women earn on average only 84% of men's wages, they use to work for free 2 months a year
 - There are 74% men in national parliaments in Council of Europe countries
 - Mainly men are leading powerful institutions, religions
 - 1 out of 3 women in the Europe has experienced physical or sexual violence since the age of 15
- A woman is killed every 3 days in each country of Europe, a femicide
- Equality between women and men is not a reality in Europe today
- Research shows that it is a benefit to have more women in responsible for decision making
- Be sure that women and men are equally represented in different bodies and institutions: it is a question of justice
- Gender equality: an issue for the whole of society

5. People often ignore their ignorance on this topic

- We live in a society where "gender" plays a structuring role:
 - A social construction learned and internalised by all members of society
 - Varies in different cultures
 - Carries a hierarchy: unequal power structure related to gender in our society today that disadvantages mostly women
- Gender interacts with other structuring factors for different individuals, age, ability, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, class, etc.
- Multiple forms of discrimination and violence
- In many cases, policies or instruments, which are seen as "gender neutral" are in fact "gender blind" because they do not take into account gender- based differences

6. Gender mainstreaming at CoE

- An objective of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017
 - Aim of gender mainstreaming: not an end in itself but a tool to reach real equality between women and men
 - Dual approach: gender mainstreaming + specific policies for the advancement of women, including positive actions
 - 40 Gender Equality Rapporteurs nominated in both Council of Europe intergovernmental committees and monitoring bodies since 2012
 - Promoting a change of approach in committees: look at activities from a gender equality perspective
 - An internal Gender Mainstreaming Team supporting the work of all services
 - Different supporting tools: manual for GERs, training sessions, policy briefs, factsheets

- What is gender equality?
 - Equal visibility, empowerment, responsibility and participation of women and men in all spheres of public and private life
 - Equal enjoyment of human rights
 - Legal status of women in Europe has greatly improved, but no effective equality yet
 - Inequalities are on the rise - the crisis and austerity measures have hit women hard
 - Often subject to multiple discrimination: migrants, disabled, Roma, LBGT, and neutral, as the legislation of Malta, etc.

7. CoE standards on gender equality issues

- **European Convention on Human Rights** – Art. 1, 14 and Protocol 12, provide for a general prohibition of discrimination + Case-law compilation on Gender Equality on the website of Gender Equality Committee
- **Istanbul Convention with GREVIO** (Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence) 22 countries have ratified.
- **Anti-human trafficking Convention**, 2005, with GRETA, Experts on action against trafficking in human beings
- **European Social Charter** with the possibility of Collective Complaints
- CM Recommendations from 1979 - on many topics: education, media, sexist language, sex discrimination, GM, public participation

With institutional setting on Gender Equality:

- Gender Equality Transversal Programme:
- The Gender Equality Commission (GEC) [again a Steering Committee in 2016-2017]
- Gender Equality Rapporteurs appointed within intergovernmental bodies and other CoE structures (e.g. monitoring bodies)
- The Gender Mainstreaming Team, CoE staff members from various sectors
- Istanbul Convention/GREVIO in a separate Division on Violence against Women (VaW) - not with Gender Equality

8. Five objectives of the gender equality strategy 2014 2017

1. Combating gender stereotypes and sexism

- To tackle gender-based discrimination and stereotypes concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms in the education sector, overcoming future discrimination in employment and other fields of life
- States should ensure that adolescents have access to appropriate information on sexual and reproductive issues, including family planning, contraception and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases.
- With regard to the school curricula, in some countries religious leaders are consulted by ministries of education before taking decisions on teaching moral values has been mentioned as a factor endangering women's rights and gender equality given the restrictive attitudes of some religious leaders towards the role of women in society.
- History being taught must be reviewed, women are ignored. What image of women in textbooks?
- But the difficulty are huge, for instance on surrogacy? There is an action of Dr de Sutter, Parliamentarian of Belgium, she wants an ethic surrogacy. It has been rejected by a short majority. She is coming back with a surrogacy allowed in family. If the door is opening, there are no limits for new ways of the exploitation of vulnerable women. Is our body always at the disposal of men?
- Promoting gender-sensitive education in general is a good pedagogic means for countering gender stereotypes and ensuring gender equality in all fields of life.
- Example IT COUNTS, **itcounts-app.org** an application for your phone, created by young students, to count how many men, how many women in meetings, boards, films, etc.

- Compilation of good practices in education, media, in our communications
- Factsheets on combating gender stereotypes in and through education
- Handbook on implementing the measures in media, with suggestions of good practices

2. Preventing and combating VaW (Violence against Women)

- Violence against women is not a family affair, it is a discrimination, a human right's violation, it must be linked with gender inequality
- Domestic violence are not penalised in all member states as such, and when it is, often, a constant ineffective reaction, starting by the indifference of the police, difficulty of proofs, fear of exposing privacy, fear of the consequences, where to live, how, protection of children. The perpetrator should be removed from the marital home, but it is not the common rule
- **Istanbul Convention** defines domestic violence:
 - Includes acts of physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence between members of the family or domestic unit, irrespective of biological or legal family ties. Intimate-partner violence between current or former spouses or partners is also included
 - Criminalises several forms of gender-based violence, i.e. violence directed against a woman because she is a woman or violence that affects women disproportionately such as stalking (which includes cyber-stalking), sexual harassment, sexual violence and rape. The Convention also counters forced abortion and sterilisation, female genital mutilation, forced marriage which is rape, rape in different countries is a crime
 - Gathering good practices/promotion of the Convention beyond Europe, South Programme
 - Cooperation with North Africa, Middle East
 - Committee of Parties meets at Strasbourg, in force 22 Parties, 47 countries
 - Monitoring by GREVIO (Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence). The aim of the monitoring is to establish a baseline evaluation of how the Convention is implemented. March, 2016. It adopted a questionnaire which it will use to monitor the implementation of the Convention in each Party. The experience of CEDAW (The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women) is very useful.
 - Federice Acar chairs the GREVIO, she is still member of CEDAW Committee, a former president.

3. Guaranteeing equal access to justice

- Access to justice and redress for women victims of violence in armed conflicts
 - Studies have shown that where ex-combatants fail to reintegrate into society, the consequences are far-reaching for the entire post-conflict society in Europe
 - Women migrants from Africa often find themselves in an irregular situation and human drama. Rape committed in a transit country is claimed as an act of violence for no other reason. But, that rape can characterise persecution based on political reasons, ethnic, religious, ideological, under the Geneva Convention of 1951, protective and costly for states. These women are so numerous rejected
- Migrant women exposed to exploitation such as domestic workers are one such group
- In healthcare settings and in obstetric care in particular, as illustrated by a recent report from Slovakia
- Women with disabilities face the risk of multiple forms of violence, old women
- Hate speech against women in many European countries, including on the Internet, which is characterised by threats of murder, sexual assault or rape
- Barriers: legal and procedural, socio-economic, cultural, indifference, gender bias, and stigmatisation by the police, prosecutors and judges.
 - In Spain and in the UK, specialised courts for domestic violence have been put in place, it is hoped they could deal penal and civil aspects. The specialisation of lawyers counselling women victims of violence is an asset and the education of police, prosecutors and judges
 - Fast-track procedures constitute interesting tools when it comes to issuing protection, eviction or other forms of emergency orders when the protection of the victim is at stake.
 - The lack of awareness of procedures among victims; the lack of financial resources and restrictions on the availability of legal aid,
 - Compounded in the case of women victims of violence or other situations of vulnerability
 - Danger of using children's rights as a pretext to curtail the rights of a woman victim of violence
- It is necessary to collect adequate data on women's access to justice, clear information and statistics, research
- Conference on persistent barriers like in Bern, November, 2015, showed that it is a global question, the necessity of reformed legislative bodies and the current habits

- Council of Europe “Gender Equality Strategy 2014- 2017” focused on equal access to justice for women and it is a basis for discussions on the obstacles
- Compilation of good practices

4. Achieving balanced participation in political and public decision-making

- CoE proposes a representation of 40 %, why not 50 %, parity? It is the only equal participation
- No specific measures for women on company boards, important challenges. Firms with more women in decision making process are making more benefits
- Achieve balanced participation in Council of Europe bodies, institutions and decision-making processes in all fields. Council of Europe has had Catherine Lalumière as a secretary general. Even statues inside the Coe are representing men.

5. Achieving gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures

- The Gender Strategy after 2017 is going to be discussed at Tallinn, June 31, July , 2016
- Human rights defenders: Depending on the country, obstacles to their work may take the form of: legal and administrative restrictions impeding the registration of NGOs and their access to funding; burdensome financial and reporting requirements; smear campaigns; threats and intimidation; judicial harassment; abusive inspections and surveillance; confiscation and destruction of working materials;
- Women’s rights defender: specific obstacles when they challenge values, sexist stereotypes and traditional perceptions of gender roles, face intimidation, pressure, threats, verbal and physical attacks, defamation, cyber-attacks and disruption of victims’ hotlines.
 - Armenia, women’s rights organisations and defenders were violently targeted in 2013 during the discussions and adoption of the Law on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities between Women and Men.
 - National authorities often fail to consult or listen to women’s rights defenders on relevant policies and laws
- Group of States Against Corruption, GRECO, the gender dimension of corruption
- Pompidou Group, the gender dimension of non-medical use of prescription drugs
- Eurimages, (EURIMAGES supports full-length feature films and animation as well as documentaries of a minimum length of 70 minutes).strategy on gender equality adopted in Oct. 2015

- Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport, EPAS, to develop indicators for gender mainstreaming in sport etc.
- Partnerships: CoE works with policy makers, academics, civil society experts and international organisations to ensure implementation of CoE standards on gender equality.

9. Current challenges

- Gap between gender equality standards and their implementation in practice
- Growing threats to women's human rights at regional and global level
- Weakening of national gender equality mechanisms, budget cuts, wider mandates
- Increased difficulty to make the case for gender equality due to misconception of what "gender" means in the context of gender equality
- Adapted in all European languages the translation of Human Rights, no more "Men Rights", ridding the past patriarchal vision

A good challenge for all of you the Conference of European Churches