



ADDRESS BY

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

President Efthymiou, colleagues, as always it's a pleasure to speak with you on the subject of gender equality.

It is important that we continue to explore and raise awareness of gender issues.

So, I want to share with you some thoughts about a theme I will be exploring for my Annual Report in the Summer Session

First, however, I want to update you on what's been going on at the OSCE. A decision was made by the Ministerial Council in Vilnius, concerning gender, which echoes what we resolved as a Parliamentary Assembly in Belgrade. Similar to our resolution on Gender, Migration and Economic Independence, the Council's decision on "Promoting Equal Opportunity for Women in the Economic Sphere" highlights some of the facts we already know about women's role in the economy; some of the challenges that persist and a means to rectify them:

The Vilnius document recognises the contribution that women make towards a country's economy; but acknowledges that:

- women continue to face inequities in labour market participation;
- participating States must collect and analyse data that identifies and addresses the obstacles preventing women from fulfilling their full potential in the economic sphere;
- states must promote a more equitable sharing of domestic (unpaid) work by men and women;
- must actively facilitate the development of women's entrepreneurial and other work-related skills, and incorporate gender aspects in migration policies, to prevent human trafficking; and
- must initiate or strengthen policy and legislation that would facilitate and protect equal opportunity for women in the labour market.

Friends, when the Ministerial Council and the Parliamentary Assembly find common ground and can make parallel projects a priority, a great deal can be accomplished when the message about the reality of continued gender imbalance in the OSCE area is delivered, together, by all bodies and their Special Representatives; it is as if the stars are aligned and a real breakthrough can be achieved. I am excited.

Therefore, I am participating in a project by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) on Cross-Party Women's Caucuses in the OSCE Region. This project is intended to gather valuable information about how Parliaments in the OSCE deal with women's issues; the machinery in place and how they influence political agendae.

So we will be carrying out a survey together, ODIHR and the PA, to identify parliaments that host women's caucuses. This project, we hope will tell us whether these caucuses are effective. It will collect best practices and lessons learned. At the same time, it will help us understand the different barriers faced by different regions.

There is no magic solution to gender equality, no one answer. I am sure we will find that different Parliamentary procedures and practices, different ways of electing parliamentarians will require flexible solutions.

I hope I can count on you to serve as a focal point of contact when your Parliament is approached. I encourage all of you to cooperate with ODIHR on this project and to provide the responses they seek in their survey, which you should receive later this spring.

I am sure you all agree that gathering accurate information and reliable data is an important first step in any public policy making...in this case, improving representation of women in our Parliaments and on our delegations.

An analysis of the responses will be released in autumn. I will share the results with you.

Next, I want to share with you some highlights from the OSCE Secretary-General's Annual Evaluation Report on the Implementation of the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality.

It shows that there is still need:

- to increase the numbers of women as Heads and Deputy Heads of OSCE field missions and within the leadership of OSCE Institutions.
- Address the insufficient attention paid to women's issues in the OSCE'S first dimension, i.e. politico-military affairs.

Compare the lack of attention in this sphere to the successful work being done by OSCE on the economic status of women which I addressed in my Annual Report last year. There are a number of projects integrating gender with the economic and environmental spheres. So we must be thankful for some progress and continue to push for attention in the other areas.

In terms of the six OSCE priority areas, there has been extensive work done by several field missions including those in Tajikistan, Albania, Kosovo, Skopje, Montenegro, Ukraine, Moldova, Baku, Bosnia, Astana and Herzegovina to strengthen legal and policy frameworks concerning gender equality, discrimination, domestic violence, and enhancing the role of women in the promotion of peace and security.

I applaud the Secretary General's call on the Permanent Council, the Chairmanship and the 56 participating States to revise the 2004 Gender Action Plan; to develop well-defined targets, clear timelines, and monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

As such, I welcome the appointment of Ms. June Zeitlin as the Special Representative of the Irish Chair-in-Office. I also welcome the new Senior Advisor on Gender Issues in the OSCE Secretariat Ms. Miroslava Beham. I look forward to a co-operative and fruitful relationship with them. I hope that the three of us, together with other gender focal points in the OSCE, can promote gender awareness in our Organization and provide impetus and input to the process of updating the Gender Action Plan.

President Efthymiou speaks repeatedly of the value added when the OSCE and the Parliamentary body work together. I agree with him.

The Secretary-General's report shows that the OSCE is moving in the right direction, albeit slowly, but also that there is still a long way to go before gender balance will be achieved.

We, at the Parliamentary Assembly are not without our own faults regarding gender imbalance. Our election of Officers at the Annual Session last year did not result in improved gender representation, as hoped, on the Committees and among Vice-Presidents.

I will repeat the long-standing refrain that we must set an example in our own shop here, and within our own Institutions.

We have seen no change in composition of the Bureau, of the (21) twenty-one positions, we only elected (4) four (19%) women. We must improve this imbalance. So I re-issue my challenge to you, fellow delegates, to raise that target to 30% in 2012, elect (6) women to the Bureau. I remind you, evidence suggests that the critical mass necessary to influence decision-making by a minority group is 33%. It is achievable.

But you, women must step up. Put your names forward for positions. If you don't, you won't lose face it is true, but you won't win either. So I urge you, men to give them a nudge.

Our work at the OSCE PA and the OSCE is invaluable; not only to raise awareness about gender issues and equality, but also to eventually make equality a reality in the lives of men and women.

While it seems as if this journey toward equality "entre les sexes" is never ending, the objective is worth it if we can create opportunity for all of our citizens to participate fully and contribute fully to the progress of our nations.

This means that even in countries of the OSCE, such as the Nordic nations, where we believe we have achieved gender equality, we must always be watchful for its erosion.

For instance, in Canada recently, there was a shocking case where 4 women in the same family – including three teenage daughters - were murdered by their father, and one of their brothers, because they were women and in the name of family honour. The father, his current wife, and the brother of the girls were found guilty of pre-meditated murder and sentenced to life imprisonment. There is no death penalty in Canada.

The point here is that equality between men and women, the freedom and autonomy of both is not a simple equation. There are subsets of race, culture, religion, ethnicity, indigenous status, refugee and immigrant status, sexual orientation and gender identity that also act as double, triple and multiple barriers to gender equality. The egregious example of honour killing, in a multicultural and progressive country like Canada, serves as an example.

In the OSCE region, there is no one country that still does not have work to do regarding promoting and implementing gender equality. There may be some societies and communities where women's rights are more advanced, but even these are not perfect.

This leads to my final point and the preliminary introduction of the topic of my Annual Report: The cross cutting issue of gender and minority status and the condition of women belonging to national, religious and ethnic minorities, notably indigenous and Roma and Sinti women, in the OSCE region.

To a certain extent, this topic is an extension of the theme explored last year. Having established a basic understanding of how women face barriers that prevent them from achieving economic autonomy, I want to now explore how the most vulnerable of these women, those that belong to minority groups, face additional challenges that prevent them from participating, not only in economic activities, but also in the political and social life of their societies. These include lack of access to education and employment, health care services, electoral office, and the subsequent poverty, exploitation,

susceptibility to trafficking, slavery and domestic and societal violence many of them face because of systemic discrimination and stereotyping.

In the end, these women face a double-burden: they are women, and they belong to a minority group.

Minority women are present in all of our countries, but their access to and participation in political, economic and social lives varies. In some cases, there are tremendous differences even within societies.

For instance, in Canada, despite the rights and protections guaranteed to minority groups under the law, there are still examples of societal and domestic violence like the one I gave you earlier. Aboriginal women in Canada have the protection of the constitution but they are still the most vulnerable on our society.

CEDAW, the UN commission for women's equality, has decided to conduct an inquiry into the 550 cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women in Canada. The government of the Province of BC, wherein lies Vancouver (as in Vancouver to Vladivostok), is also conducting its own, similar public inquiry.

Sometimes, rule of law alone may not be sufficient to protect women from violence, until after the violence has occurred.

There must be systemic efforts at prevention. Vigilance, public education and awareness programs, school programs and sensitivity training within institutions are also needed, on a continuing basis, to teach the importance of non-discrimination, of respect for each other and the right of every human to co-exist in dignity and respect within civilized society.

While I have referenced Canada, the strides made by women belonging to minority groups in the United States is well-documented; but success and advancement for all women is still not realised because of racial and minority status.

In Europe, the plight of the Roma and Sinti people is experienced differently by its women than by its men.

Moreover, migration patterns over years, decades and even centuries has meant that, throughout the OSCE region, women belonging to ethnic, religious and national minorities or indigenous peoples, find themselves alienated, to some degree, from the larger society, without the means by which their voices and concerns can be heard.

This is where we, as parliamentarians must become their voices. If we are not committed to the betterment of our societies, who should be?

As parliamentarians, we know that the only way to change the status of these women is with sound policies and legislation where necessary.

However, the barrier to doing this may be constrained, in part by the lack of gender- and ethnicity-segregated data on social exclusion, access to education, and employment, among other factors.

We, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly can and must begin to play a leadership role, highlight this issue to our governments and exchange best practices at these meetings about how to promote a deeper engagement of minority women in our societies. No one of us has all the answers.

I encourage all of you to consider the condition of minority women in your countries, and to contribute to and exchange on this topic at the Annual meeting in Monaco. I hope we can explore this issue further at the gender luncheon and that you will support my Supplementary motion.

Security is not just about border protection, not merely about the threat outside our gates. Security, within the nation state will never be achieved if we deny our citizens equal opportunity to fulfil their potential and participate in the prosperity of our nations. We have learned from history and more recently from the 'Arab Spring' that citizens thus excluded will rise up and demand inclusion and equality.

Thank you for your attention. I would love to hear from you, your ideas about advancing this issue and from any of you willing to work with me on a Supplementary motion at the summer meeting.

I value your ideas and input. We are all in this together.

If you wish to see the Q and A following this presentation please go to:

<http://www.oscepa.org/meetings/winter-meetings/894-2012-winter-meeting-streaming-videos>