

Dear Participants,

On behalf of the General Secretariat of the Council and as President of its joint Committee on Equal Opportunities, I would like to warmly thank you for your participation in this conference. I am particularly pleased to see that we have a sizeable number of men here today. This event is the perfect way to mark the International Women's Day.

Having read the survey and listened to the presentations and discussion today, I am both surprised and shocked. The prevalence of violence against women in the EU means one thing: we all have an obligation to act.

Because not enough is being done. Despite efforts undertaken in recent years, too many women are still affected by violence.

Violence against women undermines women's core fundamental rights: their right to liberty, security, dignity, physical and mental integrity and life.

Where there is violence, there can be no equality. And equality between men and women lies at the heart of our European values.

Gender-based violence has a deeply adverse effect on society as a whole. It affects not only the immediate victims, but has far-reaching consequences for others, including children.

Back in 2010, the country that I know best, Spain, which held the Presidency at that time, asked the Fundamental Rights' Agency to collect and compile statistics, including comparative data on violence against women within the EU. Data is a first step to demonstrate the extent and nature of the problem and giving it the visibility needed.

We need data to inform and support legislation and policy, and I am grateful to FRA for having undertaken this important work.

I would encourage everyone to read the survey in its entirety to get the full picture, including the recommendations on how to fight violence against women. Allow me to recall some key issues:

- first, the problem of **under-reporting**.

Violence should always be considered a public, not a private matter. However, when it takes place between partners or in close relationships, as we heard, it often remains hidden. Steps should be taken to encourage women to report cases and to give them access to justice.

- **Secondly, training**

We need training for professionals who interact with victims of gender-based violence.

- **Thirdly, we need policymaking initiatives.** This means, for example, information and awareness-raising campaigns; research and education programmes. Reaching out to boys and men is also important;
- **Fourthly, victim support.** We must ensure that victims receive support, no matter who they are and where they live;
- **Fifthly:** we need **data** to make sure that all action is evidence-based.

**And finally,** we must urgently ensure that new phenomena such as **cyber violence, on-line harassment, stalking and bullying** are covered by legislation. We already have certain legal instruments in place. But EU law must keep pace with the changes in society. And of course all legislation must be vigorously implemented.

Just to assure you that we do not have to start from scratch, I'll give you a brief outline of, what is already in place. As Director-General in charge of Justice and Home Affairs, I admit being most familiar with instruments - legislative and non-legislative - adopted within "my" area.

In the "Stockholm Programme", Member States committed themselves to support and protect those who are most vulnerable or who find themselves in particularly exposed situations. This includes persons subjected to repeated violence in close relationships and victims of gender-based violence.

Significant legislative developments have taken place, serving to recognise the rights of victims of gender-based violence. The so-called "Victims' Directive" [Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime], adopted in 2012, contains several specific references to victims of sexual violence, victims of gender-based violence and victims of violence in close relationships - not least thanks to the negotiating skills of some of our Parliament speakers today, representing the FEMM committee. Inter alia, it calls for a specific needs' assessment and a targeted and integrated support.

Two other important pieces of legislation that deserve mentioning is the "EPO Directive" (Directive 2011/99/EU on the European Protection Order) and a Regulation adopted last year (Regulation 606/2013/EU on mutual recognition of protection measures in civil matters) , which covers protection orders in criminal and civil matters. These instruments aim at ensuring that victims of violence can still rely on a protection measure issued against the perpetrator if they travel or move to another EU country - protecting the right to freedom of movement in the European Union, one of the cornerstones of the EU Treaty.

I seize this opportunity to encourage Member States to ensure the timely and effective implementation of these instruments.

Combating and eliminating all forms of violence against women requires coordinated policies at national, European and all other relevant levels.

Addressing the issue of combating gender-based violence properly also requires concerted efforts between international organisations. The Council of Europe is the source of the most comprehensive legislative instrument to date in combating violence against women, namely, the Istanbul Convention.

Ladies and gentlemen, today we say no to violence against women. Europe leads the campaign to put an end to this problem. And we must continue our work.

We have created great momentum today. Let's take this issue forward. And let's look wider. Gender-based violence also means violence against men. I speak as a man.

On behalf of the Rotating Council Presidency, with your permission Ms Kollia, I can inform you that as an immediate follow-up to this conference, draft Council conclusions on "*Preventing and combating all forms of violence against women*" will be presented to delegations for discussion. These conclusions will also address the issue of "female genital mutilation", one of the most horrifying forms of violence against women.

As you know, Parliament will also host a conference on gender-based violence this afternoon, that many of you will probably attend.

**Today, Europe takes another step forward in the struggle to eradicate violence against women. For too long, violence against women has remained a hidden scandal. We need to know the problem in order to fix it. The landmark survey by the Fundamental Rights Agency represents a real breakthrough. Its scale and rigour are unique. It has given a voice to the victims of violence, at last. It is a proud European achievement.**

**So allow me once again to thank and congratulate the Fundamental Rights Agency, the Hellenic presidency and all the participants here today. Equality and human rights are values that we cherish. By combating violence against women, we put these values into practice. We all have a part to play in making violence a thing of the past. Thank you very much.**

Finally, I should remind all speakers and panellists that you are now invited to a working lunch where we will continue discussions. All other participants are invited to a buffet lunch in the rooms next to this Press room.

Let me finally thank all the colleagues from FRA, the GSC and the interpreters who have made this interesting event possible. Without their efficient work this event would not have run as smoothly as it has.

Rafael Fernandez-Pita y Gonzalez