
KORČULA SCHOOL 2014
“COMBATTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN – THE CASE OF SEXUAL HARRASSMENT”



KEY MESSAGES

The 2014 Korčula School was held in the town of Korčula from 26th to 28th September 2014. The topics on the agenda (Attachment 1) were violence against women, especially the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, with a focus on sexual harassment and abuse, in institutions, the media and sports. The School was well attended by participants from the region and the EU (Attachment 2).

1. **The Istanbul Convention on Violence against Women** is an important document signed by 36 countries and ratified by 14 countries, including from the region: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia. There is still a need to pressure for ratification (some governments have a problem to get the Convention ratified by Parliament for “obvious reasons”).

It often seems that countries in the region sign and ratify international documents, especially those relating to gender equality that do not “cost them too much” but make them “look good” in the eyes of the international community, hence doing lip service to the issue and limiting implementation of the same. This also applies to UN conventions and documents.

The gender mainstreaming approach, while overall desirable if applied and backed by resources and capacity, has in many respects “killed” the edge of equality and women’s rights, metamorphosing the issue into an institutional framework where it gets lost “in translation”. Gender equality standards in the EU accession “package” are lacking and the demands on the fulfillment of non-discrimination against women are “soft” in terms of conditions for accession which strongly marginalises the issue and the action by the governments preparing for membership.

2. **There are many good examples of countries**, like Austria, Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia and others which have taken steps to change legislation and address institutional capacities to deal with violence against women. ³
3. **Implementation of the Convention remains a challenge**, like other instruments relating to gender equality and women’s human rights. The challenges are multifold but mainly relate to:
 - **Institutional set up and capacities** for implementation relating to law enforcement (judiciary, police) and social services (safe houses, rehabilitation). Violence against women, harassment and discrimination is perpetuated within the institutional framework itself – by government officials who are patriarchal, traditional and who tend to discriminate without having the necessary training, education and awareness.

Most often the emphasis is on violence in the family rather than on violence against the woman as a victim. This is a patriarchal concept more socially “acceptable” and much easier for the institutions to deal with. This practice coincides well with the populist approach of the conservative right wing parties and religious leaders, thus again working against women as victims.

Overall, statistical data is lacking both as a lack of instruments and capacity of statistical offices, but also due to a lack of reporting by victims (it is often perceived as an internal family issue linked to “shame”). When cases are not reported the victims are also not compensated, legally or even financially.

Violence against women and their human rights conducted by state institutions remains fully an elusive category. Different laws and regulations in different spheres are generally not weighed against their impact on women’s rights and discrimination which is then perpetuated in their enforcement.

- **Political awareness and readiness** to address violence against women, including in center left political parties on a substantive and systematic level as a matter of party policy. But sexism remains as an issue within parties and sexual harassment in the party is rarely sanctioned. But when sanctioned it gives results!

³ See presentations at: http://www.europeanforum.net/gender_network. Zita Gurmai and Gisela Wurm with the Speaker of the Croatian Parliament, Josip Leko who was in an official visit to Korčula.

While citizen and civil society awareness is rising regarding violence against women, the issue continues to remain mute in S&D political party programmes and action. It receives low priority even among women politicians. When the issue was raised in party discussions the “tension” between the concept of violence in the family vis à vis violence against women arose. Party leaders are more sensitized to the issue of violence in the family than the latter. Paradoxically, some participants commented that the LGBT issue today seems more in focus, eclipsing violence against women and gender equality. Maybe something can be learnt from LGBT advocacy.

Hence, the challenge remains how to position and empower women politicians within their parties and in parliament to raise the issue of violence against women and non-discrimination. Women at high party levels, most often than not, tend to line up behind the party leader and have limited power even if the 30% quota is enforced – what happens to the 70% of women in the parties? Where is their voice? Women politicians in S&D political parties should break the “traditional mould” and be in the forefront. But intra-party solidarity should be restored together with intra-party democracy.

- **Budgetary limitations** in terms of state allocations in the budget to address and deal with violence against women and violence in the society in general. This is paradoxical because the cost of violence against women for the state is high and should influence budgetary decisions and allocations to address the same. For example, the cost of domestic violence is globally estimated at 600 euro a day.

Gender sensitive budgeting has not given the answer so far, as it remained isolated from the mainstream budget decision-making. Even when targeting health and social services resources remain limited.

- **Societal and cultural** environments and patriarchal societies which remain conservative and reluctant to open up issues of violence against women and sexual harassment. Patriarchy is not gender neutral and power relations perpetuate violence warranting a thorough change of relationships between the sexes. Countries in SEE have experienced “re-traditionalisation”, i.e. in the transition they tried to return to “traditions” going to extremes, hence the necessity for a rational debate on where traditions and “resuscitated” traditions meet to the benefit of progress.

In traditional societies the concept of human rights is still a “foreign and imported concept” and women tend to replicate their traditional family roles and “gender identity” (as daughters, mothers and wives) in the society, at their jobs. This makes it even harder to address the issue more forcefully.

- **Sexual harassment** is most elusive and there are overall few laws which address the issue. It happens on the street, in the workplace, at universities and in schools. This is a cross-cutting issue directly relating to the core of women’s human rights

and equality. It is as a rule not reported as is a combination of many issues - naming and shaming and a perception that reporting will not get them anywhere (men stick together).

In countries that have specific laws on sexual harassment in the workplace there remain the following key challenges:

- i. the issue of definition (most laws only recognise rape) - not only consensual but that the other person has to give consent;
 - ii. implementing institutions - police should have a mandate to go against these cases. Regarding the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace collective agreements should include clauses on the same and can be a useful tool.
- **Media** is in many respects the culprit for the way violence against women, and in general sex stereotypes are perpetuated. Sex is omnipresent in the media and sex scandals sell in a climate of erosion of professional standards in journalism and a cultural vacuum. Even political billboards thrive on sexist messages. This is paradoxical since journalism has today become an underpaid female profession - around 70% women are in the profession and 80% students of journalism, while owners and managers of media outlets are men both in the private and public media.
 - **Women in sports** are discriminated against, last but not least in terms of a pay gap, but the issue is invisible and not addressed.
 - **Societal coalitions between civil society and S&D parties** are still weak to make a change on these issues.

4. Recommendations

- When in government:
 - i. Insist that S&D parties in power, as well as in the parliaments and the media be clear and decisive on issues of gender equality, violence against women and sexual harassment.
 - ii. Insist on an integrated statistical database on violence against women.
 - iii. Take steps to pass laws on sexual harassment and collect, at least, anecdotal evidence to substantiate.
 - iv. Insist on education system reform based on human rights, fundamental freedoms, civic, and sex, education and do not yield to clerical and right wing pressures.
 - v. In terms of labour relations collective agreements could be a vehicle to address these issues in new labour compacts.
- Political party action:
 - i. Insist that party leaderships take this issue seriously as a matter of party policy externally and internally.
 - ii. Insist that when S&D parties make coalitions, and often approach the political centre, they do not sacrifice and trade off gender

- equality to reach compromise which will end up being very expensive for our democracy.
- iii. Insist on the enforcement of gender equality within parties, as an issue of party democracy and decisive action to deal with sexual harassment and sexism within parties.
 - iv. Start a process of analysis why women are leaving S&D parties and some even establishing their own alternative parties which may end up being a more serious trend.
 - v. Increase cooperation across party lines in the region and explore the possibility of agreeing on a joint Declaration on gender equality and women's rights, to include financial/budgetary implications for implementation. This would not only empower women in party leaderships but above all recommit S&D parties to the issue and urge them to assume leadership in the society and political process on the same.

Participants expressed satisfaction with the meeting and urged that the Korčula School truly becomes a political and ideological think tank on gender equality issues.

Report

"Transformative politics – women in politics –"

WHEN A WOMAN ENTERS POLITICS – SHE CHANGES

WHEN THOUSAND WOMEN ENTER POLITICS – POLITICS CHANGES

LET'S CHANGE POLITICS!



I. **Key Findings, Messages and Recommendations**

- Inequality is a systemic issue and societies change slowly. Progress on gender equality, with all the gains over time, has been slow, uneven and not a given. Transformative action and changing gender equality paradigms today demand both feminist activism (in the society and parties) and a partnership with men. This is slowly changing per force, as more women assume decision making