



**Provisional edition**

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## **Proceedings of the European Conference of Presidents of Parliament (Strasbourg, 24-25 October 2019)**

### **Theme 3: Women in politics and in the public discourse: What role can national Parliaments play in combatting the increasing level of harassment and hate speech towards female politicians and parliamentarians?**

**Ms Liliane MAURY PASQUIER (President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe):** My dearest colleagues,

I would like to welcome you all once again to our Chamber, apologising for the small delay this morning, due to a number of improvised, unexpected meetings that were a little longer than expected. It's not very Swiss, but in the end, it's very European.

The conference resumes its work by addressing the third theme of our reflections, a major issue to which I have paid particular attention during my presidency, particularly through the initiative #NotInMyParliament.

First of all, I invite you to watch a video as part of the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe. This video presents the highlights of the policy promoted by the Parliamentary Assembly throughout its history, its initiatives and successes, particularly in favour of the cause of women and gender equality. It is also a tribute to the commitment and determination of all the women who have accompanied our Assembly in promoting and recognising the fundamental values defended by our Organisation, women who are often or were often, in the past, less visible than men. And that is why this video was made with a bias that does not want to exclude men, far from it, but rather to pay tribute to all of them.

I invite you to watch this video.

*[Video broadcast]*

It is with great pleasure that I now invite Mrs TONE WILHELMSSEN TRØEN, President of the Norwegian Stortinget, to present the introductory contribution to the third theme. In this context, I would like to express my gratitude to you, Mrs, for the quality of the extremely comprehensive report you have prepared on this subject.

**Ms Tone WILHELMSSEN TRØEN (President of the Stortinget, Norway):** Madame President,

Esteemed Colleagues,

"You must not sleep. You must not sleep, or think it a dream that will pass away." These are the words of one of Norway's greatest poets, Mr Arnulf Øverland, words he wrote shortly before the Second World War. These are words much quoted; words and wisdom suitable not only in situations where peace is threatened, but they also resonate deep within me. They are a call for me not to shut my eyes, a call for me to be willing to know and acknowledge.

As a woman, I see that sexual harassment and violence -- and the fear they instil -- create a chilling effect. As a president of parliament, I see that women and men hesitate to, and refrain from, entering the political stage and taking part in the public discourse. I am a woman and I am a president of parliament but this is not a woman's issue alone. It is a threat to democracy; a threat we must take seriously, both women and men.

President, Colleagues, it is a great honor for me to address you today. Women have a role to play in politics and public discourse. This is a topic close to my heart. It is our responsibility as presidents of parliament to pave the way and set the stage so that women can enter, participate and make a difference through political work. This is why I proposed this topic for our conference to address. As MPs, we represent our people and our electorates. This representation is fair only when our parliaments truly reflect the society we live in: 50% women, 50% men. The percentage of women in my own parliament is 40.8. We still have a way to go to reach equality. I will do what I can do to counter the chilling effect and set the stage so that more Norwegian women are inspired to get involved in politics.

*#MeToo* is an important backdrop for our debate today. I could have quoted numerous examples. We have not been spared and we have had our share in Norway. A large proportion of them from the realm of politics. Prominent party officials from across the political spectrum have had to resign from their positions. I will do my utmost to ensure that there will be no new wave of *#MeToo* in our parliaments and in our society.

It's time to go forward, to let the examples of how to remedy the situation dominate. Let's share best practices with each other; let's all work together to set up a political stage where everyone can take part. Being willing to know and acknowledge, this is a prerequisite for going forward. Without acknowledging there is a problem, solving the problem is impossible. The wave of *#MeToo* has swept across the globe. In its wake, it should be obvious to everyone that sexual harassment is a problem. But if we don't dare to look at the situation in our own backyard, if we aren't willing to know and acknowledge, we risk putting the matter aside and viewing it as everyone else's problem.

The results of the survey conducted by the IPU and PACE are shocking. Eight out of ten female MPs reported that they had experienced psychological violence. One in four had suffered sexual violence. I can only hope that this is not true for my parliament, but as President, I need to know what is true for the future.

Therefore, we are conducting a survey of all MPs and staff these days. I hope the situation will be better than what the IPU-PACE study showed. I acknowledge that it is likely that people have experienced harassment and I fear the study might also be representative for us. Based on the results, we will take measures to ensure that our work environment is one where everyone can feel safe and where everyone -- members and staff alike -- can work to their full potential.

President, Colleagues, this conference is a unique opportunity for us, as presidents of parliament, to learn from each other. When it comes to gender equality itself as a contributing factor to more women participating in the public discourse, people often look to Norway. However, we ourselves are currently looking to Sweden. Their strategy for gender equality in parliament is very interesting. In June, we hosted a joint round-table discussion, where MPs from Norway and Sweden could discuss and learn from each other. Thank you, Andreas Norlén, for your contributions. As neighbouring states and parliaments, we have close ties and it's easy to build on the experiences of each other.

I am convinced that we also have a lot to learn from parliaments further afield. I sincerely hope that this session will provide examples of measures and best practices to take home, to discuss with my colleagues in the Presidium when we examine the results of our survey. The Parliamentary Assembly plays an important role in parliaments learning from each other. PACE deserves credit for its work on the resolution of promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment. The report and adopted resolution gives food for thought and provides measures to consider when we work on harassment in our respective parliaments.

President, I commend you for your initiative "Not In My Parliament". It's a great example of how to build awareness. It's also a clear signal to all that we do not accept harassment or violence against anyone, not only when we are visible to the public eye but also in our offices, corridors, social venues and the many online platforms we operate on. On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, we will take "Not In My Parliament" to Norway. We are planning to have an event at this looking and hope it will raise awareness amongst our MPs as well as the general public.

Colleagues, we carry a great responsibility on our shoulders. All elected officials do. All that we do is dependent on the trust of our electorate. We must lead by example and not misuse the power entrusted in us. We must acknowledge that we, as MPs, are in a position of power and that we have to be especially careful in our relations with others -- be these staff members, constituents or party colleagues.

As presidents of parliament, we must foster a parliamentary culture where all members are aware of their position as role models and how to set the stage for political participation. Dare to see how the misuse of personal power hampers political participation. Dare to see how this has a chilling effect and is a threat to our

democracies. Returning to the powerful words of our Arnulf Øverland, I encourage you all to be willing to know and to be willing to acknowledge. You must not endure with the greatest of ease the injustice that does not threaten your peace.

Thank you so much for your attention.

**Ms Liliane MAURY PASQUIER (President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe):**

Thank you very much indeed for your very interesting contribution to our discussion on this topic.

I now call on Mr Michael KAUFMAN, author and co-founder of the White Ribbon Campaign, to present the second introductory contribution to our third theme.

It is up to you, Sir, to be a sort of spokesperson for civil society in this debate as you have been campaigning for 30 years in non-governmental organisations, as well as in international organisations, as an adviser for the promotion of gender equality and the prevention of violence against women.

You have the floor.

**Mr Michael KAUFMAN (Author and co-founder White Ribbon Campaign): *Merci Beaucoup.***

I'm very honoured to be with you today in this incredible moment: the *#MeToo* moment. You know, when you think about it, issues that were discussed around small tables and feminist NGOs are now being discussed around our boardroom tables, our kitchen tables. They're being discussed at our workplaces, whether it's a locker room in a factory or in our workplaces in Parliament.

You and I are part of this, the gender-equality revolution. This is the greatest upheaval in human history. Ideas, beliefs and structures that go back eight or ten thousand years are being swept away in the course of one or two generations. But we have a problem; we have a problem in our countries; we have a problem around the world; we have a problem right here in this room. You know, what a wonderful room filled with hard-working people, women and men. And yet, if you looked around yesterday when this room was absolutely full, you would see the problem. It didn't look like the citizens of your countries -- well, it did partly look like the citizens of your countries -- but it was an overwhelmingly male group of men. In other words, half the population wasn't equally represented.

Now, in my words with you today I'm not vilifying men. I don't want any man in this room to go, "Oh, why did I come today? I'm going to be, you know, dumped on for the next 10 minutes." No, this is a welcoming speech to my brothers, to be part of the gender-equality revolution. I'm not wagging a finger but I'm saying that our institutions are a microcosm of the problem. Of course they are, they are part of the history of male-dominated societies. So reform doesn't just take place in the laws that we pass, but in who we are, how we work together.

We have another problem, and here I just want to be blunt, I want to be undiplomatic. But looking around this room today, there are a couple hundred fewer people than yesterday; a couple hundred men who decided not to show up. I want to be blunt about this because, as a man, I'm ashamed of that. I'm ashamed that those men felt that the needs of half their citizens aren't really important enough for them to be here today. I'm sorry to be undiplomatic, but as a man, that really disturbs me.

It's time we did better. We must do better; we can do better; we will do better. It's not enough to say that gender equality is a good idea. It's not enough to say, "Oh, of course I support women's rights." That's not good enough. So let me share with you a few ideas, particularly ones that I explore in my new book called "The time has come. Why men must join the gender equality revolution".

Let me share some thoughts with you. First of all, if we want our parliaments, for example, and all of our work places, to be places where women are equally represented, where women belong, where women are welcomed, where women know that they are equally valued, there are different things we must do.

One of them is we have to work hard to end all forms of sexual harassment. Now, this could be a whole speech in itself, because we have a real problem in how we've addressed sexual harassment. We've tended to just focus on the most egregious and blatant forms of harassment. You know, the "I'll give you a job if you sleep with me" -- the Harvey Weinstein forms of harassment, if you will. It's true, those things do happen, but the majority of forms of harassment that women in this room and beyond experience every day at work, whether in Parliament, or in an office, or in a factory, is not the dramatic moments. It's the drip drip drip of unwanted touching, unwanted comments, unwanted looks, unwanted invitations, unwanted jokes and so forth.

What we need to do is get beyond the idea that there's just a list of things you can't do, and understand that most harassment is not about intention. It's not that a man thinks "oh, I'm going to make that woman feel bad", it's about impact. It's not about most men being bad or something; it's about the impact of actions. And so we need both policies and training of our managers and staff to prevent harassment, that focuses on impact, focuses on what I call this sort of "yellow light" when you think of the red light being things that you should never do and green is just things we can always do at the workplace. What gets people in trouble is this in-between, the gray area, to use a different colour image. And so we need fresh, we need more productive ways to address, to prevent and respond to workplace harassment. That's one thing we need. We can do these things, and there are institutions that are doing these things.

More broadly, we need in all of our countries more ambitious work to end all forms of violence against women and girls. We need better laws, we need better funding for women's programmes, we need better training of police, judges and health care providers and so forth. One of the things -- I was a member of the G7 Gender Equality Advisory Council this year, that France hosted, and we identified laws from around the world that are exemplary laws in promoting women's rights, including ending violence against women.

In all of our countries, there's much work that needs to be done. It's not only a question of laws; it's not only a question of the police; it's not a question of public campaigns. But what is really essential, as part of all these efforts -- whether it's on ending violence against women, promoting women's rights or promoting more women candidates -- is engaging men: men being part of the gender-equality revolution.

And this has been my work over the past four decades now. Four decades -- I think I started it in kindergarten when I was very little -- no, but it's been about four decades. My work has been to engage men and boys to promote women's rights. And at first it was seen as "that's a strange thing to be doing, why would men want to support these changes?" But little by little, more and more, what we're seeing now, in all of our countries, is more men who are saying, "I'm at the side of women on these issues." They're saying, "I want to ensure that the women I care about, the women I love, my wife, my daughters, my sisters, my friends, my workmates, have the same opportunities that I have, are paid the same that I am, have the same right to a workplace free of harassment and bullying, are equally represented in our parliaments". More and more men are stepping forward and saying to our sisters, "We are at your side."

In other words, this is not a battle of the sexes, but it is a battle for change. It's a battle of the present and the future against the past. A past that, frankly, has not worked well for most women. Part of that is work to end men's violence against women. Most men in most of our countries, in all of the countries of Europe, most men do not commit acts of violence against women. That's absolutely true; most men do not commit these acts of violence. But here's the problem: most men have been silent about violence against women. And because of our silence, we have allowed the violence to continue.

A campaign that I co-founded back in 1991, the White Ribbon Campaign, which spread to a number of European countries and probably 80 or 90 countries around the world, has a focus on men speaking out. Men ending men's silence to end men's violence. And so it's about men supporting legislation; it's about men supporting funding; it's also about men speaking out: learning to interrupt that sexist or abusive joke, learning to say to a brother, father, son, a friend, "The way you're treating your wife, your girlfriend, your daughter is just wrong. It's not appropriate, please don't do that." And when we interrupt those jokes, the way we need to do it is not to say, "That joke may be offensive to my woman colleague over there," but to say, as a man, "That joke is offensive to me."

The White Ribbon Campaign is just one example of the type of action that men can take, will take and are taking. We have to create the conditions where women can prioritise work. We see the problem, we see the issue. It's a very real issue, of increasing parliamentary representation of women. This is true at all leadership levels in our society. What stands in the way, of course, are things like sexual harassment and unfriendly environments, lack of respect, there are all those things. But there's also a structural thing in all of our countries: women still do a disproportionate amount of the housework and childcare.

Part of the gender-equality revolution is this: for men to do one half of the childcare work, for men to do one half of housework, and that is the number one precondition for equal pay. Because if women have to do all those other jobs, they're not going to say, "Oh, I should also, on top of everything else, I'm going to run for office." Women are not going to say, "I'm going to take on those extra responsibilities." Women are not going to say, "Oh I'm going to work for that promotion." It's just impossible for most women. So if men are doing half of the care work, suddenly, the preconditions come into place for women's equal participation, including for women's equal pay.

We actually know what works. Pioneered by the Nordic countries, policies of so-called "daddy days": non-transferable father's leave. We have the evidence that this is the single most efficacious policy: for men to take advantage of childcare, for men to move towards equal participation -- not just during those first year or two, but setting down a lifelong pattern of equal participation. We know what works, let's make that happen.

In all these things I've been talking about "how women will benefit, how women will benefit, how women will benefit", but for my final comment I want to share this with you: the gender-equality revolution is also a revolution for men.

Let me just tell you a story if I could. This is story, many years ago, when my son was born, many, many years ago — and now grandchildren. So there we were, in the delivery room, my kid was five seconds old and I didn't even yet know if it was a boy or girl. Not because I'm dumb, I know the difference, but at this point, I had so many tears in my eyes I couldn't see the little thing — and I mean the little thing on the little thing. I didn't know if it was a boy or girl until the nurse spoke. Until this point, the nurse had been speaking with a normal voice, and suddenly her voice dropped down really deep and she said, "It's a boy, what a strong little fellow."

I was totally shocked, not because it was a boy — I'd taken high school biology, I knew there was a 50/50 chance of that — but I was shocked by the change in her voice and what she said. I knew if it had been a girl, her voice would have gone up higher and she would have said, not "what a strong little girl", it would have been "what a beautiful little thing". My boy was five seconds old and he was being measured for his first football jersey. Now, he was a strong little boy, but it was also the sweetest thing that ever squirmed its way into the planet.

But that's what happens to every man in this room: from birth on, the men in this room and beyond are told "you must be strong", "you must be powerful", "you must be in control", "you mustn't show too many emotions", "you must be the bread earner", "you must have endless sex" — of course, only with women — "you must know how to fight", "you must know how to drink" -- in many of our cultures — on and on, and on. We settle and, of course, you have to have a body like a Marvel comic book hero -- which, of course, the men in this chamber do -- but not all men do. Now, we set up conditions that no man can live up to; we set up impossible expectations. In other words, along with the forms of privilege and power that men have traditionally enjoyed, there's a poison pill that we introduce to men, and we say, "You have to fit into all these things or you're not a real man." And when we can't fit into all those things, what happens? There's an internal dialogue of self-doubt about making the masculine grade.

And that's why across Europe men are more likely to take their lives by suicide than women; men are more likely to be addicted to alcohol and other drugs; men are more likely to be in prison; men die younger than women because we are less likely to ask for help. We're less likely to go to a doctor because a real man doesn't need help, you just stand on your own, and on and on. In other words, the very society — this is a paradox — the very society that has created enormous benefits for my half of the species, has said: "it comes with a cost". In other words, men are going to benefit from the gender-equality revolution.

Let me end with a story if I could. It's a story told to me a number of years ago, by a man from Pakistan, from the Swat Valley, a remote part of Pakistan. When he told me the story, I had never heard of it. Many of you have heard of it now because, of course, that's where Malala is from. Now, sometimes I get asked — before I tell you the story — sometimes I get asked: "Are men ready for this change?" Sure, it sounds good. You know, everyone in this room, I hope, is here because we're saying we're on the side of women. Inside the men in this room are saying, "I'm on their side." But, are men out there really ready for this change? Let me tell you a story.

So this man from the Swat Valley, the remote part of a remote part of Pakistan, he described it to me as a tribal region, a very fundamentalist part of the country. He goes off to law school and while he's at law school there's a coup d'etat, generals come to power. One of the things these generals did to curry favour with the more fundamentalist types was to proclaim something called the Hudood Ordinances. One of these new laws said that if a woman was raped, to prove it. She had to come up with four male witnesses. Guess how often she could: never. At which point, she would be charged with adultery, and when she was convicted, she would be thrown into prison for years or even executed. Anyway, this man comes back from law school, he sees this happening in his community and he says, "This is not right." He says it's not what he's been learning as the basis of Pakistani law. He also says it's not what his religion, Islam, has taught him. He starts to defend these women and he wins. He gets them off these charges of adultery. Well, the response of the powers that be was to trump up some charge and they threw him into prison.

Now, prisons in any country are the worst places on the planet, and they threw him into a total hell hole. That's where they threw him into. And I want you to imagine, not only what that was like, but for a second imagine what happened to him when they threw him into this prison. And then imagine what the other male prisoners did to him when they threw him into this prison. And whatever you imagine, you're probably wrong, because when the other male prisoners discovered that he was in prison for defending the women in their community they all went on a hunger strike. They said, "We are not going to eat until you release our brother here from this prison". And they won. If that can happen there, under a military dictatorship, in a country at the time with a very small women's movement, think what you can do across Europe. Think what you can do with institutions of democracy with traditions of democracy, with laws on your side, with respect for women growing, with a powerful women's movement, with bodies such as this. Think about what you can accomplish. And as I say, we not only must do more, but we can do more, and we are doing more.

This moment is a moment for the history books, the gender-equality revolution is a moment that your -- that our -- great, great, great, great grandchildren are going to be reading about in the history books. This moment of change that is going to make all of our lives better. And so I invite you as parliamentarians to bring this message back. Obviously the women are leading the struggle, but for the men in this room to bring this message back to your brothers: to be part of the gender-equality revolution. Working together as women and men, with those who don't even define themselves within that gender binary, working together, you and I are creating a better world for women. That's absolutely true. But we're also creating a better world for men and, most important of all, we are creating a far, far, far better world for our children and our grandchildren.

We must do better, we can do better and, looking at you today, I know we will do better.

Thank you very much.

**Ms Liliane MAURY PASQUIER (President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe):**

Many thanks, Mr KAUFMAN, for enlightening our parliaments with your reflection on a fundamental issue, which is at the heart of the concerns of the Parliamentary Assembly and, I hope, of all our parliaments.

It is one of the top priorities we have: the idea of creating a revolution, especially a peaceful revolution. Thank you very much indeed.

We now come to the general debate. I would remind you that each speaker has five minutes' speaking time and I would like to inform you that we must be done by 12:15 p.m. in order to make way for the presentation of the conclusions of the conference.

The first speaker on the list is Mr ŽIDAN, President of the Slovenian Parliament, and I will then give the floor to Ms Brigitte BOCCONE-PAGES, President of the National Council of Monaco.

Mr ŽIDAN, you have the floor.

**Mr Dejan ŽIDAN (President, Državni zbor, Slovenia)\*: Madame President,**

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome today's debate, which again highlights a serious political issue of power of genders and gender inequalities in social relations. In essence, this topic relates to respect for human dignity, democratic principles and an inclusive society. Slovenia has also set gender equality and the fight against gender-based violence as priorities of its activities within the Council of Europe.

According to numerous indicators of gender equality and inclusion of women in all aspects of society, Slovenia is ranked fairly high -- it is among the best performing countries in the world. It would, however, be naive to think that gender equality comes automatically with development; that we only had to wait and didn't have to invest any effort into tackling the challenges of this society. By developing partnerships we were able to take important steps forward in the employment of women, and in the number of women in top positions in politics, the economy and other spheres.

Slovenia signed and ratified the Istanbul Convention, which is the new milestone for my country in its efforts to combat gender-based violence. Although the role of parliaments is, in the first place, to check how governments transpose international commitments to national frameworks, we are bound to act in this respect, above all, by our responsibility to the entire society and the responsibility for the well-being of each and every member of society.

In April this year, the Parliamentary Assembly adopted the resolution and recommendations promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment. It has reiterated its firm condemnation of all forms of gender-based violence against women. Gender-based violence is one of the major obstacles to the achievement of gender equality, and it interferes with women's rights to fully and equally participate in political life. It also undermines the representatives and the legitimacy of related institutions.

Parliaments are platforms for the political culture of dialogue and mutual respect, tolerance and the highest moral standards. As such, they must be role models of conduct -- and not just at the declarative level but also normative. One of the important steps is to draft rules which will, on the one hand, provide suitable assistance and discretion to female members of parliaments and female staff of parliaments and, on the other, impose adequate and specific sanctions for perpetrators.

Our moral authority and personal integrity dictate our significant responsibility to fight against everything and everyone that or who uses gender-based violence to attack human dignity. As the elected representatives of the people, we, especially, must assume responsibility towards ourselves, our citizens and the entire international community to combat radical patterns of hatred and intolerance. Hate speech is a treacherous and destructive element for the society as a whole and all its sub-systems. There is no room for all-too-frequent ignorance and inaction. Zero tolerance and positive shifts in our society can only be achieved through a decisive response of the entire society.

Dear Colleagues, thank you for your attention.

**Ms Liliane MAURY PASQUIER (President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe):**

Thank you.

I now give the floor to Ms Brigitte BOCCONE-PAGES, the Vice-President of the National Council of Monaco.

And the following speaker will be Ms CAROBBBIO GUSCETTI, the President of the Swiss National Council.

**Ms Brigitte BOCCONE-PAGES (Vice-President, Conseil National, Monaco):** Madame President, thank you very much.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Presidents and Vice-Presidents,

Dear colleagues,

On behalf of the National Council and on my own behalf, I would like to thank the President Mrs Liliane MAURY PASQUIER warmly for organizing this conference, which brings us all together here, and for choosing this theme, which is of particular importance to us today and to me.

In Monaco, are women politicians or parliamentarians more victims of harassment or hatred than men? The answer is – and this is to be welcomed – negative. However, should we consider that the issue is closed? Certainly not.

Our answers are of two kinds: on the one hand, the legislative progress and, on the other hand, the value of the example.

In a democracy, Parliament must be a model institution at all levels and a workplace where women and men can work on an equal footing, in complete freedom and safety. This is important for the effectiveness of the institution, for the image of Parliament in the eyes of the public and for the role it plays as a role model in equality between women and men in our society.

Violence and harassment against women in politics, including in parliaments, are gross and intolerable violations of human and political rights. It is the responsibility of all parliamentarians – men and women – to take urgent action to put in place mechanisms to protect all women working there and to become more gender-sensitive.

In terms of political life, violence against women is often used to discourage them from actively participating in politics or from considering doing so. Global campaigns to combat violence against women in politics, such as #NotTheCost, have been launched, which I welcome. I would also like to mention the #MeToo movement and the fact that the media are increasingly focusing on combating violence against women and encouraging women, including in politics, to come forward and report violent acts, harassment and sexist comments.

I would also like to recall that I have been actively involved in the initiative in my Parliament since the beginning. In order to prevent and combat such abuses and violence in parliaments in Europe, it is necessary to know and understand the situation faced by women parliamentarians.

Strong and properly enforced laws are essential to combat violence against women. In this regard, I welcome Monaco's ratification of the Istanbul Convention on 7 October 2014. In addition, our Assembly celebrates International Girls' Day every year. It should be recalled that this is a real crusade launched by the United Nations in 2012 with the aim of supporting the improvement of opportunities for young girls and drawing public attention to the inequalities they suffer throughout the world because of their gender. In this regard, last October, we brought together young high school girls at the National Council of the Principality of Monaco to raise their awareness of the presence of women in political life.

For the Monegasque national representation, the fight for gender equality is a major issue, and we are doing everything we can to make things happen and strive for perfect equality. It is a permanent struggle, and I can say today that the lines are moving in the right direction.

Even beyond our Parliament, the Principality of Monaco is committed to the protection of women's rights. It is, moreover, very recently that a Committee for the Protection and Promotion of Women's Rights was created.

Yes, women's participation is essential to build and maintain a balanced system in an egalitarian society at a crucial time when we must protect our democracies everywhere. While the average number of women in national parliaments worldwide is 24%, I am proud to say that in Monaco, one third of the Chamber is composed of women elected: this is one more step towards gender equality.

I would also remind you that among the permanent staff of the National Council, including the President's Office, headed by one of them, we have 22 women for every 20 men.

Thus, by taking the lead in preventing and combating gender-based violence, parliaments can have a positive impact on society, actively promote a culture of gender equality and contribute to sustainable changes in attitudes and political culture.

Thank you very much.

**Ms Liliane MAURY PASQUIER (President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe):**  
Thank you, Madame.

I give the floor now to Ms CAROBBIO GUSCETTI, and I'd like to ask Ms HAATAINEN, Vice-President of the Finnish Eduskunta, to prepare herself to speak afterward.

**Ms Marina CAROBBIO GUSCETTI (President, Conseil National, Switzerland):** Madame President,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen, ladies and gentlemen,

In recent years, the issue of equal opportunities has become more topical than ever, throughout the world. The #MeToo movement, the Women's March, the *Huelga feminista* in Spain, are just a few examples.

In my country, Switzerland, things are also moving. The disparities that still persist in various areas have prompted the women's movement, parties and unions to organize a second national women's strike. On June 14, 1991, a first strike had already taken place. Half a million women – out of a total Swiss population of 7 million – had taken to the streets to demand their rights. This unprecedented mobilization had pushed the political world to act and approve the law on equality between women and men.

A few months ago, on June 14, 2019, the second women's strike took place, and this time again, hundreds of thousands of women participated in this day dedicated to equality. A transversal event in which all generations participated. This massive turnout was a good omen for the federal election held last Sunday. Of the people elected at the time of the full renewal of both houses of Parliament, 42% are women. That's a record.

The under-representation of women in politics and in managerial positions in the world of economics is only one of the reasons why many women and men in solidarity have actively engaged in a more egalitarian society. In addition, there is a lack of equal pay, difficulties in reconciling family and professional life, discriminatory stereotypes that are still widespread, as well as harassment and violence against women.

Unlike the other reasons mentioned, harassment and violence are a kind of social taboo and are therefore too often minimized and ignored. That is why studies such as the one presented almost a year ago by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Inter-Parliamentary Union are so important. It makes it possible to quantify a phenomenon and to put in black and white figures that can no longer be ignored. Threats, harassment and verbal, psychological, physical and sexual violence are unfortunately a reality for far too many women, in parliaments and elsewhere.

This is particularly the case in politics, where ideas, positions and values are exchanged and confronted. A confrontation in which too many people fail to remain courteous and prefer denigration to counter-argument. This phenomenon is only increasing with the advent of social networks. It now takes only a few clicks to criticize, denigrate, attack or threaten a person because of their political positions.

Such a depletion of the political debate is deeply detrimental to democracy and forces us to react. It is our responsibility as national parliaments to intervene and ensure that everyone can actively participate in public life, without having to fear for their physical integrity. It is our duty to send a clear message of zero tolerance towards harassment, threats and violence.

It is also essential to strengthen counselling services in the hope of increasing the number of complaints, which is lower than the number of incidents that occur. In addition to the stigma of violence, women who have been victims of such acts often carry with them a sense of guilt and shame, feelings provoked and fueled by a society that is still too patriarchal, which instils in women a sense of insecurity and duty. At the end of 2017, an advisory structure was set up at the Swiss Parliament for women parliamentarians – also for men – who have the opportunity to consult a specialist to find out what to do in the event of harassment. I am proud to also be a strong partner in the #NotInMyParliament campaign.

However, I believe that in order to combat violence against women, we must tackle the root of the problem, by tackling gender disparities in all areas of society. As long as women are discriminated against and structurally disadvantaged, they will continue to be victims of violence.

It is not for nothing that the Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence recognises in its preamble that the *de facto* achievement of equality between women and men is a key element in the prevention of gender violence.

In my opinion, it is particularly important to break the taboo and silence surrounding harassment and gender violence. The paradox is that women who dare to criticize violence against women and analyse the causes themselves risk becoming victims of violence.

The time has come to break this vicious circle by talking about the phenomenon, analysing it and fighting it openly, to commit to a more egalitarian society in which all opinions deserve to be respected.

In conclusion, I would like to express my deep gratitude to you for your strong commitment to the fight against violence and discrimination against women and to the Council of Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly and its President, Mrs Liliane MAURY PASQUIER, for the campaign #NotInMyParliament and for her commitment to equality.

It is only by joining forces, by overcoming our national political divisions, that we will be able to make our voices heard and build a truly egalitarian society.

Thank you.

**Ms Liliane MAURY PASQUIER (President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe):**  
Thank you.

I now call Ms HAATAINEN to the floor.

The following speaker will be Ms Carmen Ileana MIHĂLCESCU, Vice-President of the Chamber of Deputies of Romania.

**Ms Tuula HAATAINEN (Vice-President, Eduskunta, Finland):** Madame President,

I'd like to start by thanking the President of the Assembly Ms Maury PASQUIER for having put this important topic on the agenda and my colleague Ms TRØEN and Mr KAUFMAN for excellent introductions.

Twenty-five years ago, the Beijing UN declaration and platform for action was a major step towards equality between men and women. I was very inspired by what we accomplished in that UN Conference, but today we are still facing the same problems, and attitudes have not changed. Women's rights, human rights, are challenged even here in Europe. Rising conservatism and nationalism see women as nothing more than family-builders and house-warmers. While, at the same time, we are constantly defending basic human rights of women, we have to keep moving forward as well.

Today, we are dealing with an increasing level of sexual harassment and hate speech towards female influencers, politicians, journalists and parliamentarians. A good example is Ms Greta THUNBERG who is mocked and ridiculed even by heads of states. This tells us that we have not done enough and lack of equality is a fact no one can deny. Every time that a woman is ridiculed or mocked because of her gender, I remind myself of the words of the former United States Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, who said, "There is a special place in hell for women who don't help other women. If we women do not stand up for ourselves, how can we expect men to do it."

Movements and campaigns such as *#MeToo* have opened everyone's eyes on the subject of sexism and the need for stronger measures to combat it. Harassment and hate speech towards women along with stereotypical treatment of women at work and in the media, weakens women's ability to exercise their rights and pursue opportunities.

Finland is a forerunner of women's rights in many ways. Today we have 47% of women MPs in parliament, and we are also a strong supporter of the Council of Europe's work. Unfortunately, violence against women in Finland remains a problem for us. I'm not just talking about physical violence but also internet harassment, which aims to silence and frighten the victim. Hate sites and trolls use a tactic we in Finland call "targeting". They first pick up a "target", usually female, and start using every possible form of harassment against this target: phone calls, text messages and social media, making the victim's life intolerable.

Finland's government under Prime Minister Rinne has identified violence against women as one of the challenges for the present government. Our government has promised to draw up an action plan for violence against women. Government is also committed to promoting gender equality in the budget processes and in all key reforms.

Finland has actively supported the Council of Europe's work on equality and women's rights. What we need is concrete measures. I'd like to commend you, Madame President, for your initiative to launch the Assembly initiative to counter sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments. The Finnish Parliament joins you in your appeal to send a loud and clear message that sexual harassment and hate speech are simply unacceptable. Parliamentary actions are important but they are not enough. They should be complemented and accompanied by systematic awareness-raising at all levels in society. In this effort, we need to join forces with all other relevant actors in Europe as well as globally.

Thank you, Madame President.

**Ms Liliane MAURY PASQUIER (President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe):** Ms MIHĂLCESCU has in fact left, so I give the floor now to Mr SERRANO, Vice-President of Parlatino.

The following speaker will be Mr Fernand ETGEN, President of the Chamber of Deputies of Luxembourg. Please, prepare to speak afterward.

**Mr José SERRANO (Vice-President, Parlatino)\*:** Thank you very much.

I am looking for ways to be a better man every day, to be less macho, because I am aware of gender-based violence and I wish that were true of all men in politics.

Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of Jorge PIZARRO, who is the president of the Latin American Parliament, it is an honor for me to address your Honorable Members and to tell you what Parliamentarians in Latin America and the Caribbean are doing across the continent. Of course, we have a very difficult set of circumstances in Latin America as a result of violence against our own peoples, but our commitment to democracy is one that we have to carry out in the face of resistance across Latin America.

We in Latin America and the Caribbean are working to restore strong institutions of democracy, but we also respect the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of our Members. We are working to consolidate democracy and doing so to make sure that we have effective remedies to allow for prevention against women. And we will fight using all the weapons of peace available to us.

When you safeguard the physical and psychological integrity of women, then we are protecting not only women, we are protecting our societies as a whole. I was the son of a feminist who was exposed to gender-based violence, but as a Parliamentarian, I can only look with admiration at the resilience of the victims of men's violence, who continue to dream their dreams.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we need to have remedies for such women, but at the same time we are looking for effective sanctions which, in all too many cases, are simply lacking. And we find cases that are dismissed with impunity for the perpetrators. The World Economic Forum earlier this year said that when women are properly represented and can participate in leadership roles, then it is more likely that laws, resolutions and decisions will be inclusive as well as representative and will take a variety of different opinions into account.

Women, therefore, are trying to become more involved in various bodies and law-making bodies. So women, who in the past were excluded, are now working on prevention policies as well as restorative efforts. We have also seen a rise in the number of femicides. This is a form of violence against women. And we've had an increase in the number of deaths of women and many take place in the home -- women die at the hands of husbands or partners. The figures are alarming: there are at least 270,000 cases across 23 countries of Latin America of women who were murdered by husbands, partners or family members.

Now, SDG No 5 of the 2030 Agenda gives us the point of departure in order to strive for a specific target, namely to promote gender equality and prevent violence. This is enshrined in the Sustainable Development Agenda and we, in our Parliament, are working to combat violence against women. We have integrated committees on human rights, justice and detention policies for indigenous people as well as integration, and this is our number one strategy. And we would invite this Council in your Parliamentary Assembly, Madame President, to be a part of this fundamental alliance that we are calling for in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The new framework that we have put in place across the countries of our continent, by means of laws to prevent and eradicate violence against women, means that we take an overall holistic view because we have to look not only at violent acts but look at preventing them and intervene in society, work towards the independence of women and look at our educational social policies. Our social policies have to be visible and we have to work on law-making to this end in our Parliaments.

We are certain that we will achieve our objectives, but it is not only the State that should take responsibility, rather this is a matter for men and women alike -- but for men in particular. And that is why we should put in place instruments to promote a shared responsibility across society, bringing in academics and stakeholders as well as representatives of indigenous groups. This is the only way in which we will be able to generate a change that is needed for sustainable development in general in our societies.

Now, it is not only that I am or that we should all be shoulder to shoulder with women, rather that we should also counter macho behaviours as well as misogynistic attitudes that undermine our societies. We, therefore, have to work together to build gender equality, because if women are free then our nations will be free.

Thank you very much.

**Ms Tone WILHELMSSEN TRØEN (President of the Stortinget, Norway):** Thank you Mr SERRANO.

The next speaker on the list is Mr Fernand ETGEN, President of Chambre des Députés from Luxembourg and to be followed by Mr Gordan JANDROKOVIĆ.

Mr ETGEN, the floor is yours.

**Mr Fernand ETGEN (President, Chambre des Députés, Luxembourg):** Ladies and gentlemen, Presidents,

It is a great honour for me to stand before you in this historic place that I am discovering today. The Council of Europe has always been for me the symbol of democracy and the protection of human rights in Europe. I cannot imagine the situation in which we would find ourselves without the main achievements of this Organization.

We are here today to discuss the situation of women in politics. 2019 represents a special year in this regard for our country. 100 years ago, almost to the day, on 26 October 1919, the first elections by direct universal suffrage were held in Luxembourg. The Grand Duchy was one of the first countries to introduce women's right to vote. Despite the early introduction of women's vote, women's representation in the Chamber of Deputies remained marginal for a long time. In the October 2018 parliamentary elections, the proportion of female candidates rose to 46% and almost all political parties submitted lists with at least 40% female candidates, but we are still far from the expected parity with only 17 women elected out of a total of 60 deputies (a percentage of 27%). It is our duty as parliamentarians and Speakers of parliaments to continue the fight for equal participation of women.

The European Commission against Racism (ECRI) noted in its report on Luxembourg that politicians and the media do not generally use hate speech. However, this finding does not take into account a fairly recent phenomenon: that of hate speech online and on social networks.

While there is no specific law for hate speech against women parliamentarians, the Criminal Code in Luxembourg provides for concrete measures in the event of incitement to hatred or violence, which may result in a prison sentence of up to two years in the event of a repeat offence and/or a maximum fine of €25,000. Recently, perpetrators of hate speech have been convicted for their speeches published on the Internet, underscoring the strong judicial response to the spread of hate.

I am firmly convinced of the effectiveness of awareness campaigns. Campaigns against cybermobbing, such as "Not funny-Bee fair", have been widely successful in schools, both in primary and secondary schools. In order to protect its presence on social networks, the Chamber of Deputies has published a code of conduct with which users must comply and systematically delete inappropriate speech, after explaining the reasons for its deletion.

It should also be noted that the Internet and social networks are transnational in nature. To combat online hate speech against women politicians more effectively, Luxembourg promotes European solutions to the problem, such as the European Commission's code of conduct to combat illegal hate speech online.

Finally, allow me to come back to the Chamber of Deputies' commitment. As part of the centenary of the introduction of universal suffrage, the Chamber organized a major exhibition, together with the National Museum of History and Art and the Centre for Political Education, and commissioned a play featuring the main debates that led to the introduction of universal suffrage. Through these means, the Chamber of Deputies fights in an offensive way to promote the role of women in politics and to stifle hate speech.

Thank you for your attention.

**Ms Tone WILHELMSEN TRØEN (President of the Stortinget, Norway):** Thank you so much, Mr ETGEN.

The next speaker on the list is Mr Gordan JANDROKOVIĆ, President of Sabor from Croatia, and thereafter Mr Steingrímur SIGFUSSON, President of Althingi, in Iceland.

Mr JANDROKOVIĆ, the floor is yours.

**Mr Gordan JANDROKOVIĆ (President, Sabor, Croatia):** Thank you, Madam Chairman, Dear Colleagues,

We can all agree there is a clear consensus that women should be equal to men in the political and public decision-making process. Commitment to equality is a precondition for true democracy. However, indicators show that this is by no means easily achieved even when there is consensus in the society. There are a number of obstacles to a more sustainable participation of women in the process of political and public decision-making. From electoral systems, functioning of political parties to the role and values preserved in certain family models.

However, I believe that the main problem lies in the misconception that equality can be achieved without real change in people's mentality and in their political behaviour. Hence, the constant imbalance in the number of women and men in political life. However, the trend is gradually changing for the better though not as quickly as we would expect. In many countries, a number of safeguard instruments with a view to abolishing discrimination and protecting women from unequal participation in politics have been introduced such as ombudswomen, national policies for equality of men and women, as well as the special laws on equality imposing a quota on electoral lists.

But, unfortunately, even if the trend is gradually growing, the gap between commitments and reality remains. Relying only on the safeguard mechanisms, quotas and implementation of affirmative measures is therefore not enough. We have to adopt a different approach to change people's mindsets. This can be done, first and foremost, through the education of the young people and through continuous warnings of instance of unequal treatment.

In the upcoming Croatian presidency of the European Union, we will particularly highlight the need to implement equality policies focusing on decent working conditions for women.

Allow me now to shift to the topic of hate speech against women in politics and public discourse. It is generally one of the challenges we frequently meet as a consequence of extreme behaviour, and whose spread has been further facilitated by the use of digital means of communication. All of us politicians, and particularly we leaders of national parliaments, have the obligation to suppress and condemn any form of hate discourse. Our task is to promote at all times a positive approach and a well-argued political dialogue and to constantly invite our colleagues to refrain from using unacceptable language, including when they talk to or about women MPs.

Dear colleagues, allow me to conclude by saying that all members of this society but particularly politicians, public figures in the media, bear the responsibility to create a social climate that condemns and discourages any behaviour of hate, intolerance and exclusiveness, and to act in preventing and sanctioning such behaviour. Thank you.

**Ms Tone WILHELMOSEN TRØEN (President of the Stortinget, Norway):** Thank you, Mr JANDROKOVIĆ.

The next speaker will be Mr Steingrímur SIGFUSSON, the President of Althingi in Iceland, to be followed by Mr Jan Anthonie BRUIJN, from Eerste Kamer in the Netherlands.

Mr SIGFUSSON, the floor is yours.

**Mr Steingrímur J. SIGFUSSON (President, Althingi, Iceland):** Madam President,

At the outset, I would like to thank my good colleagues, Tone and Mr KAUFMAN, for their presentation and you, dear Colleagues, for your contribution.

I had the pleasure of participating in the PACE work as a member of the Icelandic delegation around a decade ago and I also chaired the PACE Committee on equality and non-discrimination, a topic very dear to me then, as it still is.

This last theme of our conference is extremely important: women in politics and public discourse. Apart from the fact that women are underrepresented in politics, it's also indisputable that they face tougher times in politics than men. This, among other things, is well illustrated by the fact that women usually exit politics earlier, after a shorter time than men do. Thus, they have, on average, shorter experiences, and thus they are less likely to be as influential as the men. So we must look at this deeper than just counting heads and looking at proportions. Are women in politics in a position to be as influential as they proportionally should be when we come to numbers? And that's where, I think, part of the problem lies.

Now, the result of the PACE-IPU study was alarming and it has set things in motion as we heard from Norway, and now we are, in Althingi, the parliament of Iceland, undergoing a survey in the same manner and we expect the output to be an important tool for us in the work ahead. Despite our apparently very good track record in Iceland, topping the gender-equality index list year after year, we have certainly had our downturns and scandals.

The *#MeToo* movement open boxes of secrets and empowered women to come and tell their stories of horrible harassment and sexual abuse. Stories of female politicians in Iceland was an inspiration. So we decided -- and this was soon after I was elected as Speaker -- to organise the so-called "Barbershop" event in parliament early last year. The concept was originally developed in cooperation between Iceland and Suriname, intended to encourage men to take up important issues of gender equality; the word "Barbershop" referring to the traditional meeting place of men. It was later developed to become a concept or mixed-sex event, as was the case in Iceland.

The Althingi Barbershop was a closed event for MPs with external specialists -- excluding even our staff -- and operated under strict Chatham House Rules. Initiated with keynote lectures from specialists, we then proceeded in working groups, first gender-separated and later gender-mixed. At the end, the parliamentary

fractions delivered pledges in a session open to the media. The tangible outcome of this event was, among other things, changes to our code of conduct, adding specific references to sexual and gender-based harassment and violence as unacceptable behaviour, one that will not be tolerated.

Despite the promising pledges, we experienced a scandal late last year where a small group of MPs was observed consuming alcohol at a bar and verbally harassing female colleagues. A shocked guest at the restaurant recorded the affair on her mobile and when the recordings became public the nation was shocked. Understandably, this sad affair also had an impact on the public's trust in parliament, which actually had been on the rise since the 2008 crisis in Iceland. This lesson is a good illustration of the well-known fact that it's not enough to deliver promises and pledges, you must also live up to them.

Before concluding, dear Colleagues, may I remind you of an invitation I sent you earlier this autumn to appoint female MPs to participate in the Reykjavik Global Forum of Women Leaders. There, over 400 female leaders from over 70 countries will gather from 18 to 20 November from the field of politics, academia and business, and we sometimes refer to this as the Davos for women only. There, Madame President and dear Colleagues, we have an enormous responsibility to create a safe and healthy working environment for all MPs, not least our female colleagues.

A democracy ignoring or lacking the voice of half of its population cannot be considered a well-functioning one. Let's remember that women's rights are human rights, just as important and universal as the right to freedom of speech or freedom of opinion. And actually, finally, it would be interesting to carry out an experiment to have the whole world run by women for the next 50 years and compare the outcome to the last 50 or 100 years behind us. One thing is certain: I don't think we will have two more world wars if we are fortunate enough to give women a bigger say in our common future.

Thank you.

**Ms Tone WILHELMSEN TRØEN (President of the Stortinget, Norway):** Thank you Mr SIGFUSSON.

The next speaker will be Mr Jan Anthonie BRUIJN, President of Eerste Kamer in the Netherlands, to be followed by Baroness Susan GARDEN, Vice-President of the House of Lords in the United Kingdom.

Mr BRUIJN, the floor is yours.

**Mr Jan Anthonie BRUIJN (President, Eerste Kamer, Netherlands):** Dear colleagues,

I would like once again to emphasize it is a great pleasure for me to be here today. As I have been the president of the Senate of the Netherlands for almost four months now, this meeting in Strasbourg marks my first participation in a European Conference of Presidents of Parliament. It has been a wonderful and inspiring experience for me to meet so many of my colleagues from all over Europe. Also I would like to extend my gratitude to our hosts at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and to the Secretariat for organizing this conference in such an excellent way.

With regard to this morning's topic, I must say that after reading the issues brief about the study done by IPU and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, I was shocked by the results. The fact that female colleagues and female staff members have experienced sexual harassment in one form or another, in such great numbers, is horrendous and unacceptable. Let me first state that I am perfectly aware that equality between women and men both inside and outside Parliament is something that is still not achieved. That women are facing far more than just a historical back step to men is something a growing number of people is becoming aware of including myself, but that women in politics across 45 European countries are experiencing harassment on such a wide scale is something that I, I must confess, did not realize until I read the study.

Colleagues, in our Senate in the Netherlands we strive to make our organization a safe and secure place to work. Therefore, a study into the well-being of our staff has been recently been conducted. The survey, based on anonymity, concerned all staff members and focused on vitality, stress, life-work balance, discrimination and also on sexual harassment. It showed that these issues still occur also in our house. The results are used to better our policies so that we are able to provide the best working environment possible. Everyone working in our Senate (politicians, staff and visitors alike) should feel safe on our premises, both physically and psychologically. We try to ensure this by providing an open and transparent organization where everyone

should feel free and safe to speak their mind in case of harassment, first of all by contacting colleagues and seniors. In case they do not feel safe enough inside your organization, we provide an external confidant, who is available at all times.

Colleagues, as a male politician, I am personally motivated by the efforts of the white ribbon campaign that Mr KAUFMAN has so passionately spoken about this morning. The Dutch white ribbon campaign was launched in 2017 with the support of the government, specifically the Ministry of Education. Being a good room role model is something that I, as a private person as well as a public person, strongly believe in. I will take home with me the suggestions and ideas presented today. Where possible we will look into ways to implement them to better our organization. In 2020 the Dutch Senate marks the 100th anniversary of the first female senator in our country, Ms Carry POTHUIS-SMIT, she too was at first subject to sexist remarks and actions. Later on, her expertise was respected, although she did mention that over the course of her 17-year-long membership of our Senate, one male Senator kept refusing to shake her hand, all those years. Today, almost 100 years later, we can laugh this off as something that is from another day and age, but today's session proves that it is not, and that it is important to keep speaking about these challenges and this kind of behavior.

Thank you.

**Ms Tone WILHELMSEN TRØEN (President of the Stortinget, Norway):** Thank you so much, Mr BRUIJN.

Our next speaker is Baroness Susan GARDEN, Vice-President of House of Lords in the United Kingdom, and thereafter Mr Andreas NORLÉN, President of the Riksdag in Sweden.

Baroness GARDEN, the floor is yours.

**Baroness Susan GARDEN OF FROGNAL (Vice-President, House of Lords, United Kingdom):** Madame President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It's a great privilege to have the opportunity to speak at this great Council on a topic of such importance, and I've been keen to learn from other speakers about how, as parliamentarians, we can assure that we're all protected as we go about our work.

A hundred years after the first women gained the right to vote in the UK, it is disturbing that women in politics are increasingly the targets of hatred. We hear of daily threats of rape and murder and women parliamentarians needing to protect their homes and themselves as they go about their public duties. Yet these are people whom the electorate has chosen to be their representatives to speak for them, to address their concerns. Something has gone horribly wrong if politicians are seen as fair game for abuse.

In the UK, we had the tragic murder in June 2016 of Jo Cox MP, a young, bright, highly loved and respected mother of two, who was killed in the street on the way to meet her constituent. Her killer was not sane, but he felt he could justify his actions because of the negative messages given out by the media over corrupt politicians.

Since then, the debate over Brexit has caused angry discourse in our country. As people's positions have hardened, so impatience and anger have increased. Death and rape threats often come by social media messages, which hide behind anonymity. Surely one measure would be to ensure that any email, tweet or message has the origin of the coward who sent it. People might think twice if they knew that by sending horrible messages they could immediately be identified and challenged.

The United Nations and this Council have undertaken reviews into violence against women, particularly in politics, where women have to put their heads above the parapet. They need to be recognised by those who elect them and those they serve. This is an international issue, which we all need to address urgently.

So I'd like to highlight four things which national parliaments can do in this area. First of all, we can expose the extent of the problem. Last year, the UK Parliament undertook its first-ever bicameral gender-sensitive Parliament audit using a self-assessment tool kit developed by the Inter-Parliamentary Union. And our Joint Committee on Human Rights has also recently published its report on the current level of threat and abuse of members of parliament generally. The evidence it received is distressing. So too is the Committee's conclusion: that it is possible that abuse has become normalised. As the Committee says, this is not just about protecting our politicians, it is about ensuring the future of our democracy.

Second, turning to the issue of effective support, in the UK we have needed to protect some parliamentarians and their families with measures such as panic buttons as well as police protection. All parliamentarians receive personal security advice, as indeed do their staff.

Third, as parliamentarians, we have a duty to legislate where necessary. The UK has set about tackling online hate crime as evidence and considered in the Online Harms White Paper. And the government has asked the Law Commission to review hate crime legislation. We know that online offending is as serious as offline offending.

In the UK, there's legislation in place to deal with internet trolls, cyberstalking and harassment, and perpetrators of grossly offensive obscene or menacing behaviour. A new police online hate-crime hub is being set up to improve the police response to victims of online hate crime, but we need to know the identity of the perpetrators. And the UK has also supported the European Commission initiative with industry to agree on a code that calls for the removal of illegal content within for 24 hours. We want to see a free, open and safe Internet, but all the evidence of hatred on grounds of race, gender, religion and sexuality, we need a regulator who will have the power to ask for transparency reports from companies.

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, as parliamentarians we have a duty to ensure better education so that, from very young, children learn to respect each other, to manage difference, not to hurt others and to understand the damage it can do to those who find themselves on the wrong side of abuse. We have a long way to go, but it is vital that we build a caring community if women are to fulfil their talents and aspirations and undertake the work of politicians.

Fellow Parliamentarians, I believe strongly in the principle that we should be the change we want to see. At the start of my speech, I referred to Jo Cox MP, who was so brutally murdered whilst carrying out the job she loved. Jo Cox once said, "We are far more united and have far more in common with each other than the things that divide us." Acting on that belief, we must ensure that women can play an increasingly important role in politics and in public life and discourse.

**Ms Tone WILHELMSEN TRØEN (President of the Stortinget, Norway):** Thank you so much, Baroness GARDEN.

Our next speaker will be Mr Andreas NORLÉN. He's the President of the Riksdag in Sweden, and thereafter Ms Maja GOJKOVIĆ, the President of Narodna Skupština in Serbia.

Mr NORLÉN, the floor is yours.

**Mr Andreas NORLÉN (President, Riksdag, Sweden):** Madame President,

Distinguished Speakers and Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the speaker of the Swedish Parliament, I, of course, see it as one of my duties to promote gender equality among the members of parliament. I firmly believe that the voters are entitled to expect a parliament with a work environment that meets the needs of both women and men. It should, of course, be possible for an elected representative to carry out her or his assignment fully, regardless of whether they are female or male members of parliament.

The Swedish Parliament consists of 47 per cent women and 53 per cent men. The Swedish Cabinet has 23 ministers: 12 women and 11 men. This means that we have come a long way when it comes to gender equality in numbers, but we also have a parliament where men and women have the same opportunities in practice. The Swedish Parliament's working group on gender equality is chaired by one of the deputy speakers and consists of one Member of Parliament from each of the eight parties in Parliament.

The group conducted a survey of gender equality in the Swedish Parliament during the last electoral period. This survey shows that female and male MPs, in general, feel that they do have equal opportunities when it comes to exercising influence and having political impact. However, among the MPs who are young women, the general feeling is that there are greater challenges. For example, they feel that they are questioned to a greater extent and they experience problems with domination techniques and abusive treatment.

Another factor that affects the assignment as an MP, to an increasing extent, is threats and violations, mainly through social media. This applies to both women and men but takes different forms depending on gender. Also in this regard, MPs who are young women are especially exposed.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in 1918 the first decision was taken in the Swedish Parliament to introduce universal and equal suffrage. That means that 100 years ago, women struggled for the right to make their voices heard in elections. Women of today are struggling to make their voices heard in public debate without receiving hate and threats in return.

In Sweden, a quarter of the elected representatives in local, regional and national parliaments have said that threats, harassment and violence directly affect them in some way. For instance, it is sadly not unusual that they exercise self-censorship regarding sensitive issues -- a direct consequence affecting the democratic mission of politicians. But we also face a more long-term problem. If harassment and hate speech are becoming an increasing part of a politician's everyday life, I'm afraid that the number of people, especially women, willing to take on such a task will be very small.

Colleagues, I very much welcome the work of PACE in this regard, for example, the campaign "Not In My Parliament". The survey conducted by PACE and the IPU gave us cold figures: high figures of gender-based remarks, psychological violence and sexual harassment directed against women. We have to acknowledge that politics, unfortunately, is a part of society in this regard as well.

In this spirit, we take on the tasks pointed out in the PACE Resolution 2274 promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment. Together, through inter-parliamentary work, we can reinforce and learn from each other. The President of Stortinget gave us important insights earlier and she hosted the latest Nordic round-table discussion in Oslo not long ago on this issue. I appreciate this exchange of experience and ideas.

One aspect that has already been mentioned is the importance of making gender equality a matter for everyone. It applies to men and women alike. I think one of the most important things that can be done to end harassment and threats against women in politics is to make it a priority for men as well. One of the core values of democracy specifically mentioned in various documents of the Council of Europe is that every human being is equal in value and rights. This means that women's rights are human rights; this means that violations of women's rights are violations of human rights and thereby also violations of democracy itself.

We -- who are men and do believe that men and women should have equal opportunities in society, in general, and in politics, in particular -- have to raise our voices and use our positions of power to lead and to show that any form of discrimination or harassment against women members of parliament is absolutely unacceptable, and frankly shameful. This is our task. After all, all of us here have prominent positions. What are we doing with the power that we have in our hands?

Thank you.

**Ms Tone WILHELMSEN TRØEN (President of the Stortinget, Norway):** Thank you, Mr NORLÉN.

Our next speaker will be Ms Maja GOJKOVIĆ, President of Narodna Skupština from Serbia, and she will be followed by Mr Angelo FARRUGIA from Malta.

Ms GOJKOVIĆ, the floor is yours.

**Ms Maja GOJKOVIĆ (President, Narodna Skupština, Serbia)\*:** Thank you.

Distinguished President, distinguished Secretary General Mr SAWICKI, distinguished Speakers of Parliaments, distinguished MPs,

I am really delighted to have the opportunity to greet you today as well, on behalf of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, and I am particularly pleased with the fact that within this important segment of conferences focused on gender equality and particularly on hate speech towards women in politics.

It is often the case that, when we speak about gender equality in our societies, we focus on the important issues of combating violence against women, economic independence, political representation, while it frequently happens that hate speech is ignored, or we women politicians believe that we can tackle this issue on our own. This is why I believe that the Council of Europe's campaign "Not In My Parliament" is extremely important for raising awareness of parliaments across our whole continent about how important it is to focus on hate speech facing women politicians and parliamentarians in our countries. On this occasion, let me reiterate that I strongly support this joint battle.

Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to use this opportunity, as a woman who has been in politics for a long time, to share my experience with you. First, I need to emphasise how pleased I am that today, in the Republic of Serbia in the National Assembly, there are 94 women MPs, which is nearly 38 per cent women. And also,

women in our parliaments, numerous of them are heads of committees, heads of parliamentary delegations. This is something I am particularly glad about because when I entered politics at the beginning of the 1990s, I was one of the youngest woman MPs and I was only one out of ten MPs at the time. Also, as the first directly elected woman mayor in the history of Serbia -- I was elected as the mayor of Novi Sad, my home town -- I would like to say that in Serbia, just like in other parts of Europe, it is necessary to have more women in such local positions.

However, when speaking about obstacles and the challenges that women politicians and parliamentarians face, I have to say that, in my capacity as the Speaker of the National Assembly, I have also personally faced some of those challenges. I here, primarily, refer to prejudice against women in politics. I have often been the target of misogynistic comments. You know, the essence of these comments was not to criticise my work but these were often very simply inappropriate insults that had a misogynistic connotation.

And like many other women working in public duties, I have faced the fact of being treated differently by the media than other male politicians. It means that the media care much more about what we are wearing, what we are doing, and they do not care about what we have achieved. I tell the Serbians that the media in Serbia cares more about what I am wearing on my head than what I have in my head. You know, however, as a woman politician, what I care most about -- apart from the support to my party, which is indisputable -- what I care most about is the support of women in general, common women, because it gives me special force to carry on with my work. Because, we women politicians are the voice of these women, and we are those that should set an example that there is no giving up despite the difficulties of some situations. Only like this, in this way, can we work together in building societies where we will all be fully equal.

Let me, Ladies and Gentlemen, emphasise that within the past years in Serbia, we have managed to make significant progress and to break numerous taboos. The results are evident: greater numbers in the representation of women, as women in Serbia today are holding many important official functions, and we have great visibility. And there is a great responsiveness of our society to the needs and problems that women are facing.

Today, in Serbia, women are heads of the government, heads of the National Assembly, the National Bank of Serbia and the Constitutional Court of Serbia. Also, women are leading the Public Prosecutors' Office and the War Crimes Prosecutors' Office and perform many other responsible jobs. We make jokes in Serbia that the only man in a prominent position in Serbia is the President of the Republic. But we cannot stop here. What is still ahead is the adoption of a new and more modern law on gender equality. This new law will give us an opportunity to take another step forward in improving the position of women and preventing discrimination in all fields, including media, which must not encourage gender discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes against women.

As Speakers of Parliaments, we need to send a strong and clear message that without women and our potential knowledge and creativity, there is no better future in any segment of our individual societies and our continent as a whole. At the same time, I deeply believe that we women involved in politics need to develop further solidarity between us, and thus set good examples to all those women who have voted for us.

Thank you very much.

**Ms Tone WILHELMSSEN TRØEN (President of the Stortinget, Norway):** Thank you so much, Ms GOJKOVIĆ.

The next and the last speaker will be Mr Angelo FARRUGIA. He is the President of Il-Kamra Tad Deputati from Malta.

Mr FARRUGIA, the floor is yours.

**Mr Angelo FARRUGIA (President, Il-Kamra Tad Deputati, Malta):** Thank you, Madame Chair.

I feel privileged to also be addressing this conference on this particular theme because, coming from a small country like Malta, we do also have important women positions locally and abroad. For example, the first woman EU commissioner elect for gender and equality is Helena DALLI, she's Maltese. We also have, for example, the present President Chairperson of GREVIO, which is the group of experts on action against violence against women and domestic violence, as a consequence, of course, of the Istanbul convention, she is also Maltese. She is the doctor Marceline NAUDI. We also have other women who have important positions

abroad. I mean, I was following Michael KAUFMAN, who was introducing the subject today, coming from Canada, I remembered also my good friend Susan BARNES. She was a woman parliamentarian, also a member of the Liberal Party government in Canada at that time.

However, we did also have local Presidents of the Republics. Recently, we had a woman President of the Republic. We had also a majority of MEPs in the European Parliament. However, did we do enough? No. We have also a deficit in our Parliament. So what we did is, recently, we issued a consultation document on gender balance in parliament. We had a lot of consultation documents with everyone in order to ensure that we come out with clear legislative proposals.

In fact, we already prepared an amendment to the Constitution, where in the next election, the next general election, if the number of women representation is less than 40 per cent, then there will be a mechanism -- a Constitution mechanism -- in order to be represented at least with 40 per cent in parliament. Now, this is something that both parties -- the main two parties -- are discussing in Malta and hopefully we will come to an agreement in order to ensure that we are addressing gender balance in parliament.

Another issue is the Equality Bill, which was introduced few months ago in Malta, and which, of course, is of paramount importance because we are here dealing with various spheres of life to promote equality, to prevent discrimination, to establish a general framework for equal treatment in employment occupation with regards to women and other genders.

These are all areas that we have to address and that we are addressing. But the most important -- I would say -- and I am very glad that I'm addressing you and precisely this week in parliament, the Maltese Parliament, we agreed that there should be a hate speech and a hate crime unit in order to address also females who, psychologically, are victims of hate speech or hate crimes. And this has to be complimented, they also have to be assisted legally -- if the case will be -- in order to address this problem.

We cannot only talk about it. We have to ensure that we do the right reforms in order to address this problem. We are not saying that we are going to have control on what is going on social media or Facebook, etc. But it is our responsibility -- every parliamentarian, every representative of the public -- has to feed the responsibility that we have to address radicalisation, including cases of racism.

So all these areas that I touched on -- but, of course, are of paramount importance -- are all a consequence of the Istanbul Convention that we ratified way back in 2014 and also complement the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy of 2018-2023.

I thank you very much.

## **Concluding session**

**Ms Liliane MAURY PASQUIER (President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe):**  
Dear Colleagues,

The list of speakers is thus exhausted. We must therefore now close the debate on the third topic under discussion. I would like to thank all the speakers here for the quality of their contribution and all those present for their attentive listening.

I will now present a summary, as far as possible, of our debates yesterday and today.

Dear President, Dear Colleagues,

At the end of these two days of conference, here are some elements of conclusion, it will obviously be impossible for me to give everything back, so rich have our debates been.

First of all I would like to thank you, all of you, for your numerous interventions, which have contributed to enriching our common reflection around the three themes that were the subject of our discussions.

In all our exchanges, the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe has been a unifying element and a frame of reference created out of the ruins of the Second World War, based on the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Over the seven decades of its existence, the Council of Europe has built up an immense body of experience, to which our Assembly has made a major contribution. We can therefore be proud of the progress made and the standards set, many of which are pioneering on a global scale. But let us not forget, and I believe this is what I will keep in mind as the common thread of the three themes we have

discussed, that human rights, the rule of law and democracy are never achieved. We must defend them again and again, promote them, continue to develop them and not let them erode. This is our responsibility and we have the tools to do so in our common European home.

Our discussions also demonstrated that the Council of Europe's political mission to build closer unity between European states, in order to promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law, is now more legitimate and important than ever. And we must carry out this mission together, united in diversity.

Dear Colleagues, here are the conclusions on each of the themes we discussed. With regard to the first theme "Our common European home for the next 70 years", the number and richness of the interventions shows not only the multiplicity of issues facing our societies and the complexity of the challenges facing our future, but also the great interest we have in facing them together. At the same time, your speeches have reminded us of the Council of Europe's ability to adapt, innovate and often stay one step ahead throughout its existence.

This ability to be as active and inventive in defending humanist and democratic values is certainly one of the strengths of our organization, in the face of tomorrow's challenges. The challenges mentioned touch on all areas of life and many of the interventions concerned the responses that we still need to provide to phenomena such as the rise of populism and extremism, racism, xenophobia and intolerance, the fight against hate speech, fake news or intox and the manipulation of information, growing inequality, poverty and marginalization, or even exclusion of some citizens, the difficulties in coping with migratory flows, the rupture between the city and the countryside, terrorism, authoritarian tendencies, corruption and transformations in progress and to come due to the increasing use of artificial intelligence, bioethical issues, climate change, and certainly others.

You recalled that in the face of these challenges, our common home is already strong, solid. It has foundations that enable it to promote unity in diversity because it is based on the common values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The European Convention on Human Rights and the Court's case-law are its cornerstones. Then comes the conventional *acquis* that forms its framework. Many of you have mentioned, among other things, the progress achieved thanks to the Council of Europe conventions: the abolition of the death penalty, the reduction of torture, the strengthening of social rights, the rights of women, children or people belonging to minorities.

Our common home is also equipped with windows and doors to the outside world that allow us to take into account global realities, and above all, to maintain a privileged dialogue with our neighbouring countries and other international organizations. Finally, within our common home, there is a crucial space for pluralistic dialogue between equals, an essential pan-European forum where everyone has the same rights and obligations. During our discussion, several speakers alluded to the risk of cracks appearing in the walls of this house because open or frozen conflicts persist in our continent and international law is being put to the test. The diversity of points of view does not always facilitate agreement and sometimes, even our common values are challenged. We are asked: will our common house be earthquake-proof or weatherproof, will it be able to withstand the challenges of our time and the unpredictable challenges of the future, and you have answered, with conviction, "yes" because we are united, we are stronger and stronger together.

The Council of Europe has already demonstrated its ability to live in tune with the times, but we must adapt to the changing world. You stressed that to stand the test of time, houses must be maintained, they need our investment, and our national parliaments have a fundamental role to play in achieving the ambitions you have listed. Indeed, many speakers stressed the need to promote even more unity among Member States, the importance of a multilateral approach, our common duty, to constantly mobilize ourselves to defend our own values, since nothing is ever achieved.

You also stressed the need to redouble efforts to strengthen citizens' confidence in democracy. A united and united Europe requires us, all of us, to listen and dialogue. Just as, 70 years ago, dialogue and cooperation should enable us today to restore our mutual trust, a trust that strengthens our common work.

You have highlighted the importance of joint monitoring and response mechanisms to respond more effectively when the fundamental principles of our Organization are called into question. As you know, the Parliamentary Assembly is working with the Committee of Ministers and the Secretary General to move forward in this direction. Finally, several interventions recall that Member States must reaffirm their political commitment to the Council of Europe and provide it with resources, particularly budgetary resources, that are commensurate with the tasks entrusted to it in our national parliaments.

We must pay close attention to this issue. As many of you have pointed out, let us never lose sight of the fact that we are here to serve our fellow citizens. It is they who are the beneficiaries of our common action as parliamentarians, and it is up to us to restore their confidence in democracy, in our democracies. To do this, we must also involve young people, listen to them, hear them and give them a voice in our democratic institutions. Dear colleagues, this brings me back to the architecture of our common house, especially its roof. The mission entrusted to us, within the Council of Europe, to work for great unity in our Member States, is a permanent one. This means that the height of the roof of our house will only be limited by our common ambitions. Let us agree to always keep a skylight in this roof so that we can regularly turn our eyes to the sky, to its 12 stars so dear to Vaclav Havel, these 12 stars promising a better future, united and united in all our diversity, within the Council of Europe. Ladies and gentlemen, I now come to the second theme of the conference, the implementation of the UN's 2030 programme and its Sustainable Development Goals.

Dear Colleagues, our debate has shown, on the one hand, that sustainable development is at the heart of our concerns and, on the other hand, that the sustainable development programme for 2030 offers us an integrated response to the unprecedented challenge facing our societies. However, we still have some progress to make to achieve these objectives. It is therefore imperative that we step up our efforts. Three main conclusions emerge clearly, it seems to me, from our discussions.

Firstly, we all agree on the paramount importance of the 2030 programme and on the priority that should be given to the integrated implementation of sustainable development objectives. We are all concerned, no country can meet these challenges alone. Secondly, our parliaments, pillars of the institutional system of democracy, and repositories of democratic legitimacy, must be fully involved in this implementation, give it the necessary political impetus and assume, at the national level, the role of true champions of transformation, because time is running out.

Thirdly, multilateral parliamentary fora such as our Assembly, at the European level, and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, at the global level, provide a very useful framework for sharing experiences and best practices in strengthening the parliamentary contribution to the achievement of sustainable development objectives. We must remain mobilized so that the 2030 programme can be a success. This 2030 programme reflects the global awareness of the deep and multifaceted crisis in human society. The 17 SDGs aim to address major societal issues such as poverty, hunger, disease, discrimination, inequality and environmental degradation. Many of you have raised the crucial importance of combating climate change but also of combating inequalities between countries, in our respective countries, between women and men and all kinds of discrimination, so as not to leave anyone behind.

Several interventions highlighted the direct link between the SDGs and respect for human rights and the rule of law, which are at the heart of our activities here in this House. The implementation of the SDGs is the responsibility of States, including parliaments. Its success will depend on the continued and increased commitment of national authorities at all levels, as well as on raising public awareness of the issues at stake and the price to be paid in the event of failure. You recalled that parliaments have a key role to play in the implementation of sustainable development objectives at the national level. In particular, they are well placed to contribute to strengthening national and local ownership of its objectives, which remains a challenge. To do this, they must integrate the dimension of its objectives into the exercise of their legislative, budgetary and control functions, as many of you have pointed out. Parliaments must also be fully involved in setting national priorities and coordinating policies for the implementation of the SDGs, including the orientation of development assistance policy. Our parliaments allow both the majority and the opposition to express their respective priorities. Inclusiveness is our strength, we must mobilize all actors as parliamentarians and give voice to their dreams, especially to women and young people, including children, who represent more than half of humanity.

You mentioned several interesting innovative instruments in this context. For example, a joint committee dedicated to the SDGs in a bicameral parliament, public hearings with the participation of the private sector and civil society, as well as the presentation of voluntary national contributions in your parliaments. Unfortunately, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, not all parliaments are yet involved in its important activities, but it is never too late to do it right.

Several of you have criticised the questioning of multilateralism and the values defended by the United Nations and the Council of Europe, which are nevertheless the sine qua non of sustainable development. Inclusive parliamentary diplomacy, within our multilateral parliamentary forums, guarantees effective pluralism and helps us to face our challenges in a spirit of partnership.

Parliamentarians are, by their nature, intermediaries between the people and the State. They must contribute to rise society's awareness of the challenges of sustainable development and to promote responsible individual and collective behaviour. They must work more actively to facilitate a broad and inclusive public debate on sustainable development issues and increase its visibility to ensure broad support among the population. In particular, parliamentarians should support the mobilization of children and young people for sustainable development and involve them in public debate. We will not succeed without their commitment.

We have only 10 years left to complete this programme, humanity's most ambitious, in order to build an inclusive and united planet, and to get to work soon to give new impetus to the implementation of the 2030 programme.

Dear Colleagues,

I now come to the conclusions on the third theme "Women in politics and public discourse: what role can national parliaments play in combating the rise of harassment and hate speech against women politicians and parliamentarians?".

In our discussions, and by already choosing this theme for debate, we have taken note of the progress made in the field of equality, participation and contribution of women in the political and public life. We also recalled the importance of Goal Five of the sustainable development goals, which also aims to end all forms of discrimination against women and girls worldwide and to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls from public and private life.

We regretted that the prevalence of psychological violence, including gender-based remarks, intimidation and threats, as well as physical violence and sexual harassment, have a deterrent effect on women's engagement in politics. Therefore, we unanimously denounced the rise in harassment and hate speech against women politicians and parliamentarians and expressed our determination to act to end it.

It is up to us, the Speakers of Parliaments, and our parliamentary colleagues, to ensure that our institution, Parliament, becomes an example in the fight against sexism, harassment and violence against women politicians and parliamentarians, which will encourage greater participation by women in the democratic process. We must fight for more equality in our parliaments, which is a prerequisite for a more effective fight against violence against women in politics and in general. We have various means of action at our disposal to move in this direction. The way forward for a gender-neutral parliament and its harassment is clear. This includes demonstrating political leadership by exposing sexist behaviour, sexual harassment and gender-based violence; making gender equality in all areas a political priority, and mobilizing the necessary resources to do so; conducting awareness campaigns along the lines of the #NotInMyParliament campaign and learning about the extent of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments to best adapt the means of combating it; conduct investigations within each national parliament, and disseminate the results; establish appropriate and confidential independent complaints and investigation mechanisms, so that victims of harassment and assault can benefit from assistance and advice on their rights; to establish disciplinary sanctions to end impunity for acts of sexual harassment and violence against women; to promote a parliamentary culture that allows all parliamentarians to be fully aware of their role as role models and to act accordingly; to provide training on combating sexism and harassment for parliamentarians, and parliamentary staff; to make training on the code of conduct and ethics mandatory; to recognize the contribution and commitment of men, and the fact that they are part of the solutions to achieve gender equality; and to promote educational programmes on gender equality from an early age.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is an important platform, both for cooperation between national parliaments and with other regional and international parliamentary networks: let us use it to forge alliances, strengthen cooperation, exchange positive measures and initiatives, and increase the impact of our work to achieve our common goal of parliaments and a society free of sexism and sexual harassment.

Dear President and Dear President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Colleagues, we have reached the end of our debates, I would like to thank you all again for our excellent discussions. The defence and promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law are an open project, and as I said, the construction of our house is far from complete. At this time of thanks, I would not want you to miss the opportunity to thank all the people who contributed to the success of this conference, all the staff, who have put everything in place so that this conference could take place in excellent conditions and without whom we would not have been able to do anything, starting with our interpreters.

We have formulated many ideas to inspire our common project of European architecture over the next 70 years; it is now up to each and every one of us to contribute to its implementation.

I look forward to seeing you in two years' time to continue together to add stones to our common building. This European Conference of Presidents is therefore coming to an end, but I would like to inform you now of the invitation we have received to hold the next Conference of Speakers of Parliaments in Greece on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of modern democracy in this country, the cradle of democracy, as you know. Perhaps I can give the floor to the President who invites us to Athens in two years' time.

**Mr Constantine TASSOULAS (President, Vouli Ton Elinon, Greece):** Madame President, Dear colleagues,

Having discussed the matter with our President, Madame PASQUIER, I am glad and honoured to extend an invitation to all of you for our next meeting during Autumn 2021 in Greece. It would be an honour for the Greek Parliament to hold in Greece the next European Conference of Presidents of Parliaments and it is going to be definitely an interesting conference because, amongst other things, it coincides with a very rare and significant historical moment for Greece. In 2021, we celebrate 200 years of our historic National Revolution in 1821 which led to our independence. So this conference will coincide with a significant date for Greece and it is my honour to invite you to begin the new steps of the new 70 years of our conference in Athens.

Thank you.

**Ms Liliane MAURY PASQUIER (President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe):** Thank you very much, Mr President.

I am sure that our colleagues are already looking forward to the opportunity to meet in the autumn of 2021 in the beautiful city of Athens.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Ms WILHELMOSEN TRØEN, Mr LARCHER and Mr FERRAND for presiding, as well as Mr FERRAND, Ms CAROBBIO GUSCETTI, Ms CUEVAS BARRÓN, Ms WILHELMOSEN TRØEN and Mr KAUFMAN for their keynote addresses, which were helpful in guiding the participants' reflection on the topics for discussion.

I must also mention the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, the Secretary General of the Assembly, who will also convey our thanks to the entire team that has been working on this conference and, of course, the City of Strasbourg.

I now invite you to join me for a cocktail, which will be served in the foyer of the Chamber.

The conference is now officially closed and I wish you a safe return to your respective parliaments and countries.

Thank you.