

UWE AGM Utrecht

Report by Vice President Isabelle TRIMAILLE

Dear friends,

First of all I wish to stress that it was a great honour to be elected Vice President of University Women Europe last year and I thank you all again.

Since the elections at the AGM in Bucharest I represented UWE at various events and I kept working on the topic that kept me busy at the last AGM, that is the subject of violence against women and the Istanbul Convention.

I. European Women's Lobby (EWL) AGM, 30-31 May, Brussels

Together with Anelies Pierot I represented UWE at the AGM of the European Women's Lobby in Brussels. It was an important meeting because it was the 25th anniversary of EWL and also because it was time to adopt the new strategy, the current **Strategic Framework** ending this year.

I added at the end of the report, as an annex, the copy of the speech of one of the key speakers at the anniversary event at the Brussels Parliament.

It was a good opportunity to state the importance of UWE and to meet members of other NGOs, as the meeting had 80 representatives. The only thing that was unhappy is that it took place at the same time as our *Meet and Greet* in London, so you can imagine that I was rather sad not to be with you, especially as I used to be a member of the British Federation (BFWG) for several years and I've got many friends there. Anyway Edith and Elena Flavia were in London so the Board was represented at both important events, that is what matters.

Other members of UWE were there as well and we had a good time, although most of the time was used for work: Marion Minis (NL) and Ilona Groenitz (Austria).

The AGM adopted the new Strategic Framework post- 2015, with details below.

Vision: "We believe in a Feminist Europe. We want a holistic, transformational socioeconomic vision, based on well-being, equality, social justice, and a powerful voice against women's poverty. We envision a culture in which women enjoy equal rights and participation in reimagined power and decision-making structures, in which all forms of violence against women has been eliminated, and women have been liberated from all forms of oppression. We envision a society in which women's contribution to all aspects of life is recognised, rewarded and celebrated - in leadership, in care and in production; all women have freedom of choice, self-confidence, and freedom from exploitation; and no woman has been left behind."

Mission: "We are a credible source of expertise and experience on equality between women and men and women's rights, representing the diversity of the women's movement across the European Union. We represent an inclusive, confident, loud, independent feminist voice and bring real women's voices into the EU political arena. We build consensus and mobilise our members' collective experience to work on major issues affecting women, to realise women's rights, equality between women and men and social justice. We act as a catalyst connecting different actors and organisations to bring change at EU level."

EWL's 6 core values

- Equality between women and men
- Diversity
- Peace
- Dignity
- Justice
- Respect

EWL's 5 key principles

- Women's rights are Human Rights (non-negotiable and indivisible)
- Solidarity
- Autonomy
- Participation
- Inclusion

- II. Work on the subject of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women or *Istanbul Convention* -continued from last AGM's workshop

The Convention covers various forms of gender-based violence, which is defined as “violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately” (Article 3 d).

I mentioned last year, in the briefing I had prepared for the workshop in Bucharest, various cases from the European Court of Human rights about violence against women. Some of them were about the so-called “honour” crimes. I've done more work on the topic so I give you now more information about the strategy used by the drafters of the convention to fight impunity of killers.

“So-called honour crimes” are one form of gender-based violence. There are many examples from different countries, mainly from the 1990s, but some even more recent than that, where judges handed down lenient sentences simply because the perpetrator claimed to have acted out of respect for his culture, tradition, religion or custom or to restore his so-called “honour”.

The Convention intends to put an end to that leniency and demands harsher punishment if the crime is committed by a family member or by two or more people acting together. Article 46 calls for aggravating circumstances to be taken into account when determining sentences in such cases. This provision is aimed, among others, at crimes committed in the name of so-called “honour”, which are usually committed by family members, who, in many cases, plot against the victim.

Crimes committed in the name of so-called “honour” are crimes that are part of the criminal law: murder, manslaughter, bodily injury, etc. What makes them different is the intent behind them: they are committed to pursue an aim other than -or in addition to -the immediate effect of the crime. This ulterior aim can be the restoration of family honour, the desire to be seen as respecting tradition or complying with perceived religious, cultural or customary requirements of a particular community. To capture this, the drafters of the Convention moved away from the original idea of introducing a separate criminal offence for so-called “honour crimes” and agreed instead to ban any attempts to justify criminal behaviour on the basis of culture, custom, religion, tradition or so-called “honour”. This means that family or community members who kill or injure a woman for her real or perceived transgression from cultural, religious or traditional norms can not invoke any of the above grounds in criminal proceedings.

Ending impunity for gender-based violence is one of the aims of the Convention. But its provisions are also directed at preventing such violence.

That is why the Convention introduces restraining and protection orders for all forms of gender-based violence, not just domestic violence. This means that, for example, a young woman who has reason to believe her family is plotting her murder because they disapprove of her lifestyle shall be given the possibility of applying for a protection or restraining order against the family members in question.

Once a case comes to the attention of the authorities, the Convention requires all authorities, not just the police, to jointly assess the risk for a particular woman under threat, and devise a safety plan for her. The idea is to ensure that a multi-agency network of professionals is set up to protect high-risk victims.

Most of the measures of the Istanbul Convention aim at women at risk of “honour crimes” on the territory of a state party to the Convention. There are, however, many women elsewhere in the world who are under threat because of choices they have e.g. the way they dress, the way they live, the person they want to marry. Some flee their country and apply for asylum in a state party to the Convention: then the Convention requires states parties to interpret the 1951 Refugee Convention in order to recognize persecution on the grounds of gender and not to expel anyone to a country where their life or freedom is under threat. States are required to recognize that gender-based violence such as so-called “honour crimes” may amount to persecution and may give rise to refugee status or to remain in the country.

III Participation at events about women rights, equality and education

Because I'm lucky to live in a city hosting two intergovernmental organizations, UNESCO and OECD, I sometimes go to meetings related to UWE aims.

Around the 8th March there were a lot of events including European and international events in and I attended one a day during a week. 2015 is an important year at international level, as it is the 50th anniversary of the UN and organizations of the UN system, such as UNESCO. I find it always useful to link national, European and international aspects of our issues.

Here are some examples, it is not a full list of events I attended.

1. **UNESCO** 30 Oct. 2014 : I attended the launch event for the anniversary of UNESCO, with a evening dedicated to Nelson Mandela.
2. **International Symposium at the French Ministry for foreign affairs: 40 years later, where have we got to?** 16 Dec. 2014

1975 marked the beginning of the United Nations Decade for Women. In 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) defined an international framework for women's rights. In 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women identified 12 critical areas of concern, and advocated transforming organizations and institutional mechanisms, as well as the use of a twin-track approach to gender equality and women's empowerment: mainstreaming and the specific projects approach.

The delegates discussed what the achievements and the setbacks are. On the eve of the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), what are the prospects for gender equality? To what extent can these global SDGs ensure real citizenship for women and gender justice for all.

3. **High level Conference for the 8th March at UNESCO, 4 March 2015 : Rethinking Autonomy of Women and equality**



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Speakers were :
Irina Bokova, UNESCO CEO,
Gertrude Mongella, former SG Beijing Conf.
1995 (from Tanzania).

Hynd Ayoubi Idrissi, Professor of Law (from Morocco)

4. International Conference: 20 years of fighting extremisms, 5th March, *Maison de l'Europe*, Paris

with Evelyne d'Auzac

Speakers :

Nadia BENMISSI, membre du Collectif "Femmes sans voile d'Aubervilliers" ; **Yolène DILAS-ROCHERIEUX**, maître de conférences en sociologie politique à l'Université Paris Ouest-la Défense ; **Bernice DUBOIS**, animatrice de la commission de lutte contre les extrémismes religieux de la CLEF ; **Lalia DUCOS**, présidente d'"Initiative de femmes pour la citoyenneté et les droits universels" ; **Catherine LALUMIÈRE**, présidente de la Maison de l'Europe de Paris ; **Françoise MORVAN**, présidente de la CLEF et **Annie SUGIER**, présidente de la Ligue du droit international et vice-présidente de la CLEF.

5. Participation in the Europe and International Commission of the French coordination of Women NGOS : CLEF (monthly meetings)

6. Attendance to the Meeting of a **European Research project** working among different countries of Europe about **equality in academic institutions**, 25 Feb.: governance, evaluation of research and research bodies.

7. European meeting about ***cities and gender***, 6th June

It was a French-German preparatory meeting/working group with Brigitte Triems (BT) from Germany and the national coordination (*French coordination of Women NGOS : CLEF*) for a symposium to be held next year. (I had luckily met BT at the EWL AGM just before.) I'll keep you posted.

Isabelle Trimaille

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Annex

[Speech given by Finn Mackay, researcher and feminist activist at EWL's 25th anniversary]

It is a great honour to be here, to celebrate your anniversary with you and to be in such esteemed company.

I'm also proud to represent my country, the UK, while we are still part of the EU...!

I'm please do be able to bring you good news from the UK. Good news about the feminist resurgence that has been sweeping my country since the early 2000s.

Feminist activism is being seen again, on the streets and online and in places it never was before. Our movement is enjoying a profile and visibility that it hasn't had for decades; and the question then becomes: what do we do with this moment. Because, one never knows how long it's going to last, and because we do need to know where we want it to go. Alongside this resurgence of feminism, we face ever increasing challenges of course. In many cases we face the same old struggles, the same old sexism, wrapped up in new media and new communication technologies.

Our Sisters before us could not have imagined in their worst nightmares the normalisation and expansion of prostitution and pornography that we have seen for example. And this forms a backdrop, against which new generations are finding their way; all the while being told to accept as post-modern irony, a situation they have never known to be any different. We must make no mistake that this normalisation of the sex industry is a most base element of the backlash against feminism, by which I mean a kickback at the successes we have achieved so far, and an attempt to stop us going further still.

Sexual objectification always follows wins for women. It is an attempt to put women back in 'their place'; that place being beneath men, individually collectively, metaphorically and literally. Commonplace sexual objectification sends powerful messages to women and children of course; but it also sends messages to men. It sends messages of assurance, messages that say no matter women's gains towards equality in the workplace, in politics, in the home – women as a class can be, and are still, reduced to their sex alone: scrutinise-able, purchase-able and abuse-able.

We also have to accept that although we have made great strides, some numbers do not change. These are the very numbers we must be judged on; and the stories, lives and lives lost behind those numbers must be what motivates us on. I'm talking of course about the numbers of rapes, the numbers of so neutrally named 'domestic homicides', then numbers of assaults.

We all want to see an end to male violence against women. And I use this phrasing consciously and deliberately: male violence against women. Because it does not just fall from the sky, because it is not a product of nature and because it is not in men's 'nature' either. We all here want to see an end to this violence. But we know we may not see it in our lifetime, and neither may our children or their children.

But it can be decreased, it can be adequately investigated and prosecuted, survivor services can be funded and stigma can be removed from victims. These are workable goals.

It is important for Feminism as a social movement that we consider what our workable goals are, as well as an alongside our ideal visions.

Of course, it is not easy to struggle against the attacks we are under, in a context of backlash. A context of ideological Tory cuts in my country, cuts to our proud welfare state, which women depend on and work in at much higher rates than men.

And it is perhaps harder still to imagine what we are struggling for, as well as what we are against, to imagine a world beyond the system of patriarchal governance that has divided the world up for sale to the highest bidder and brought us to the brink of a planet crisis.

Many of you here are involved in work which is still only firefighting. You are whittling out niches in institutions that women were never meant to work in, and which were never meant to work for women. And it is so vital that you are there; in law, in politics, in policing, in education, in social work, in policy.

This, this is Feminist activism and indeed equal representation, 50/50 at the very least, is another of our workable goals. A goal that your work strives towards; yes, even in institutions that we know are less than perfect. But these are merely our transitional demands. This is far from an end point, in fact, it is just a beginning.

We need then to encourage Feminist, progressive women into these institutions. Promoting and not competing with our Sisters and trying to win for women, albeit in a game where we never wrote the rules. In fact, we must encourage women and girls into politics of all sorts, and by politics of course I mean every kind, and everything, just as politics is no more or less than life itself. Because politics has the potential to be the bridge between what is and what could be. And that's why women's voices and

visions, from all backgrounds, must be at the fore. So we need activists in wigs and gowns standing up in court rooms, just as we need them out on the streets with placards too.

If Feminism is about women's liberation, then women as a group need to be politicised, so this is another of our workable goals. Yet time and again, young women speak to me about the sexism that they face in mixed social movements, coming to believe the lies that heroes are male, that leaders are male. And this is just one reason why women-only space is so important and so powerful. So tragic then, that within Feminism itself women-only space is rare and so often under attack. Because if that is a site where women can become politicised, skilled, confident, 'empowered' even, if that is not too tired a phrase, then that is Feminism in action. That is the means and ends right there. Surely creating and sustaining these spaces must be one of our tasks.

Not least, because we know from international research that what improves conditions for women most effectively the world over is the existence of a strong Feminist activist movement. Now, doesn't that fact just speak volumes about the power of women working together for change, in a process that always changes individuals and in turn the world around them.

This goes for policy activists too of course, and that is why groups like the EWL are so important. You inform direction, you frame issues and debates and you influence public commentary. Though I have to add, that I know from bitter experience of policy work myself, that sometimes it can feel like such an uphill struggle. That we may work tirelessly together on a project for years, with the only result being that we get a sentence spelt correctly in a policy document that will be redundant within the year.

And this is another reason why activism is so important and is helpful here, because it can push the borders of debate that bit further; so that we might get even halfway to where we want to be.

And that is further towards the liberation of women and society based on equality for all people. But this goes much further than our notions of simple equality; because you cannot stop or rest at equality within an unequal system.

So we must retain and reclaim the radical, powerful and inspiring visions of our movement. We must do our best to tackle the co-option and commodification of our movement, our theories and our language. Because, with that commodification comes dilution, comes so-called 'choice feminism' which the media so loves to promote and platform.

Well, Feminism is indeed about choice. It is about the choice to work for change, for better, for good; rather than for the status-quo, and that, is nothing less than revolutionary.

So, I look forward to your next 25 years, but more than this, I look forward to the day you are no longer needed. Carry on marching in the footsteps of those women who went before us and carry on blazing new trails for those who come after. Thank you for all that you do for women and thank you for inviting me here today.