



OPENING SPEECH

Academic Women's Perspectives on Domestic Violence

Final Congress of the Project *Domestic Violence Met by Educated Women* (DVMEW)

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to wish you all warmly welcome to the final congress of our EU project *Domestic Violence Met by Educated Women*. With very special warmth I should like to welcome the respected Minister of Justice *Anna-Maja Henriksson*¹ and the President of the Finnish Federation of University Women Professor *Helena Ranta* and all our project partners from Sweden, Germany, Romania and Slovenia. May I ask the Swedish group to please stand up. The group is led by Chief Executive Officer *Elena Dingu-Kyrklund*. May I then ask the German group from The *Zentrum für Konstruktive Erziehungswissenschaft (ZKE)* to stand up around Professor Dr. Peter Kroppe. Then the turn comes to the second German group from the German Association of University Women led by President *Patricia Aden*. Then I ask the Romanian group to stand, led by President *Alexandrina Niculescu*. Finally, it is the turn of the Slovenian team led by President *Darja Teran*. Thank you for this brief presentation. We, the organizers, are very happy to see this hall crowded with participants interested in the sad topic of domestic violence. All this serves very well the aims of the project, such as learning from best practices of different countries, disseminating new information and learning from one another.

¹ Instead of Minister Anna-Maja Henriksson the address was actually given by Private Secretary Tiina Astola.

How the Project started

First there was the title of the project. The topic Domestic Violence had a social demand. It was currently discussed in different connections and in different seminars as well as the violence against women in general. It was natural that also the European Associations of University Women should do their best to prevent violence against women. The possibility to found a new project was first discussed by the interested partners in the summer of 2012 in European university women's (UWE) congress in Helsinki and then in the preparatory meeting in November 2012 in Kiel. In summer 2013 when the International Federation of University Women (IFUW) had its triennial conference in Istanbul the theme was *Women's Role in Achieving a Sustainable Future: Education, Urbanization, Violence, and Human Rights*. One of the themes of the workshops there was *The Culture of Violence against Women as a Threat to Sustainability*. This conference opened up a global perspective for our project.

Our project started in August in the same year 2013. As we the project partners were all academic women it was appropriate that the project started from us. We chose as our topic *Domestic Violence Met by Educated Women*. We had the feeling that we knew this group of women. It was a question of us and our friends and colleagues. We were asked many times: Why did you choose expressly academic women? Is this the most important group of women if you conduct a survey on domestic violence? Our answer was: No, by no means, it is not the most important group of women, but it is the group that we are most familiar with. The close target created enthusiasm. We really wanted to shed more light and learn more about this phenomenon. One target was to lend a helping hand to our academic sisters. As academic people it was our honor not to start working before we should first become more familiar with the problem. In that sense it was well justified to concentrate on the problem of domestic violence met by educated women. The problem is common all over the world. Therefore, it was suitable to tackle it at an international level. EU offered a suitable frame for our project. The practical aims and the hopeful implementation of the results meant that this became a lifelong learning EU project under the *Grundtvig* program and under this umbrella it belongs to the section learning partnerships. Accordingly, this was not a research project, but a learning project with small surveys, collecting new data and comparing the laws and cultures and practices in different countries.

When the project started we felt that it was important to learn more about this phenomenon in order to be able to inform and instruct the members of the organizations of university women.

Furthermore, we were pretty sure that it will also have a great impact on other groups of women, if

domestic violence is discussed openly, if it is effectively prevented or even totally eliminated from academic homes in the future.

What were the objectives and targets of the learning partnership

In the project plan we set two objectives. The first was to give an overall picture of the problem of domestic violence met by educated women in different European countries by approaching the problem from the perspective of different academic disciplines. The second was to bring together people from different countries, at different ages and with different cultural backgrounds and with varying academic education to reflect and discuss the topic together. This objective has been fulfilled in that we have had four congresses in the participating countries beginning from Stockholm and continuing in Paderborn, Bucharest, and Ljubljana. Now this is the congress number 5 and it is the final congress of the project. We concentrated on the following questions, in particular, 1) What are the first signs of the domestic violence, 2) What kinds of coping and survival mechanisms do the victims have, and 3) What is the role of education of the wife and husband in cases of domestic violence? But first we had to determine what we mean by the term domestic violence. The term was defined in our first congress in Stockholm by Professor *Mona Eliasson*. She convinced us with a broad definition of the term covering the psychological, social, economic, physical and sexual aspects of violence. This is even a fuller definition than what is used in Istanbul Convention.

Our approach to achieve the objectives was to collect relevant data using different sources, such as legislation, and personal informants (police, medical doctors, psychologists, social workers, shelter home staff, etc.). We conducted additional background interviews at a national level with experts from governmental and non-governmental organizations which fight against domestic violence. In addition to collecting data small surveys were conducted with questionnaires developed by ZKE and the Slovenian Association of University Women, and the Finnish Federation of University Women.

European Added Value

One aspect of European added value is a closer European integration. Usually when we hear the words European integration we think of a political integration between European countries, especially between those that belong to the EU. In our project the European integration is included into the final objectives, while during the work of the project the integration between people and

organizations was more in the focus. One aim was to become familiar with organizations active in the field of domestic violence and with the members of the project partners. Now after two years I can say that this aim has been fulfilled very well. We have made friends with project partners, we have visited their countries and become acquainted with their cultures. We have had Skype meetings and learned to use new information technology thanks to Mrs. Uta Kroppe, our teacher.

The countries and their cultures have been present in the issues dealt with in different congresses. In Stockholm the topics connected with immigration were central on the agenda. We listened to presentations on “honor” related forms of violence and violence in special contexts, such as migrant spouses and domestic abuse, or importing a migrant, dependent wife, and early forced marriages without consent. In Paderborn we met in the university surroundings and had more historical and philosophical lectures on the relationship between violence against women, gender and power, and on the women’s movements in Europe to combat violence against women. Of course, we also discussed further the definition of violence and the individual items and formulations of the questionnaire outlined by ZKE in Kiel. The two German groups worked at a very high professional level in our project. In Bucharest again we received a comprehensive picture on the situation of domestic violence in Romania. We attended lectures given by highly ranked experts. The Romanian women whom I did not know so well beforehand impressed me, both those present in the congress and those from earlier days. Romanian women studied at such universities as the University of Paris beginning from the latter half of 19th century and were among the first female doctors at that university and in the whole of Europe. On this background, I can imagine that if the Romanian economical corruption can be eliminated or if the Istanbul convention will be ratified, it happens through the energy and competence of Romanian women. In our project the Romanian Association of University women has been very active, especially in disseminating information and in appealing to politicians. In Slovenia the congress was very illuminating and we got an excellent picture about domestic violence in Slovenia. The Slovenian Association conducted a survey on domestic violence met by educated women. We shall hear a report on the results today in the afternoon. The friendships we have made between project participants of different countries strengthen the feeling that we are not only citizens of our home country but citizens of our common Europe as well. This is integration.

A national view to the global problem of domestic violence is too narrow, in times of strong immigration in particular. Added European value consists of best practices that we learned from project partners and of European cultural and social diversity that we encountered during the project period and that enriched our knowledge of the vital aspects of domestic violence in different

countries. Now at this final stage of our project we shall try to formulate a few recommendations, how to avoid or to prevent or to reduce domestic violence. Tomorrow when we have a closed session for the project partners we shall attempt to agree about a common resolution. The project partners form a strong European network. Such a network has more power than individual organizations to demand and implement changes.

There are several issues that should be improved or changed: the number of shelter homes is insufficient in most countries, national laws are old fashioned and should be updated in order to strengthen the equality between the sexes and save women and children from the consequences of domestic violence. By the way, it was a great surprise for me to realize that the terms domestic violence or gendered violence do not even appear in the Finnish law, as we shall hear in the next lecture. Furthermore, the awareness and sensitiveness for domestic violence should be increased by medical doctors and nurses. We should raise the knowledge of women about the first signs of domestic violence. The questionnaire developed by the *Zentrum für Konstruktive Erziehungswissenschaft* in Kiel could be used as a test for the couples if and when there is a risk of their relation gliding to a violent direction. We should learn to talk more and without hesitation and shame of domestic violence in order to receive help or lend a helping hand.

We aim at empowerment of academic women to live and work with their full capacity without fear or threat of violence. The best we could wish for would be that an EU wide understanding is found to fight against domestic violence. We should have a zero tolerance for domestic violence. Every case of domestic violence is too much. Through the UWE and IFUW the results of the project are disseminated all over the world.

Honored guests, dear participants, with these words I should like to warmly welcome you to this congress. Enjoy the lectures and speeches, be active in the discussions. Let us create together a good and warm atmosphere! Let us make this congress a great success! I declare the congress opened.