

Opening Speech delivered by HE Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, at the Launch of the European Observatory on Femicide, 1 March 2018

It is an honour to be present, and to address you, at the launch of the European Observatory on Femicide. This has been a truly collaborative effort between the University of Malta, experts in the sector, and other stakeholders from eight European countries, and beyond.

The setting up of the European Observatory on Femicide is a result of the European Union Cooperation on Science and Technology Action project, entitled “Femicide across Europe”.

The results from this research project clearly indicated the need for the setting up of this Observatory. It is a pity that the EU Commission did not realise the importance of a qualified observatory, to be set up under its jurisdiction, by funding it.

However, I am proud of the University of Malta, to have seen the need for such an entity. I must also commend the work that has been done by one of our leading researchers and experts in this area, Dr Marceline Naudi.

It is through her determination that this Observatory has been set up. This Observatory will not only give the much-needed infrastructure for the monitoring and recording of the occurrence of femicide, but also, it will give the deserved visibility to the University of Malta, and our country itself.

Thanks to Marceline’s tireless efforts, and those of her colleagues, this initial research project focused on women’s wellbeing in the European Union, with important implications for the future of all women in Europe.

As we all know, femicide refers to the most lethal and criminal forms of violence experienced by women, and is the leading cause of female homicides worldwide.

For this reason, the Observatory will create a much-needed opportunity to effectively organise and collect relevant information, from across the European Union, for the benefit of all women in our countries. It will also send a strong message about our shared commitment to universal human rights.

The establishment of this Observatory is directly responding to the needless fragmentation, within our nations, when it comes to the collection of essential data about violence against women, and femicide in particular.

We cannot allow this serious crime against women to continue within our countries.

We must be bold. We must call femicide by its name, and explore the root causes of this scourge within our societies.

We must monitor gender-based violence through an ongoing process of evaluation, to be able to effectively inform and influence policies and actions, in our respective countries.

We must take steps to ensure that women and girls are protected, with the full force of our laws.

Furthermore, I believe that such measures must form part of a larger transformation, within our societies. We need to prioritise the visibility of women, in all their situations, and we must respond to the real challenges that they face.

Above all, it is critical to nurture a transformation in the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that condone or perpetuate violence against women.

Awareness-raising campaigns, the mobilisation of community action, and educational programmes for children and adults all have a role to play, to replace structures of violence and oppression with a culture of solidarity and peace.

These were the issues that I raised in my address to FEMM committee members of the European Parliament, in June of last year.

I was proud to carry the message of the researchers and experts behind the COST Action project about femicide. I made it clear that an EU-wide Observatory will be of immense practical benefit, for policymakers across Europe.

By prioritising the wellbeing of women and girls, to safeguard their dignity, we shall also be creating an environment of wellbeing which is felt by entire communities throughout our societies.

We cannot stand idly by, when data from the European Commission tells us that 1 in 3 women in the EU has been a victim of physical and/or sexual violence, since the age of 15.

Initiatives such as this European Observatory are an essential step forwards, when we acknowledge that 1 in 20 women in Europe have been the victims of rape; 55% of women have been victims of sexual harassment; and 1 in 3 women has experienced abuse by a partner.

For this reason, it is of the utmost importance that the Council of the European Union continues to implement the Istanbul Convention, in order to more effectively address our concerns. I am proud that the EU's accession to the Convention, which is of such historical significance, took place during Malta's Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

I am even more proud that Malta has ratified the Convention, and is taking steps to implement it.

The Istanbul Convention is the strongest statement and framework that we have, to address violence against women, through measures which prevent violence, while also protecting victims and prosecuting perpetrators.

Joining the Convention confirms the European Union's commitment to combat violence against women. Moreover, it gives us the responsibility to do more, to strengthen our existing frameworks.

I am confident that this EU Observatory on Femicide is an important step towards such a process of strengthening, by putting into action the full force of the Istanbul Convention.

Furthermore, this Observatory is putting the United Nations' Agenda 2030 into action, in particular, Sustainable Development Goal Number 5.

SDG 5 explicitly calls for an end to all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls, while also taking proactive measures to ensure equity and empowerment.

No woman should live in fear for her life, simply because she is a woman.

On concluding, let me once again commend the University of Malta, and the rector in particular, for being courageous and taking the necessary steps to host this Observatory, and to employ a part-time research officer.

I am confident that subsequent steps shall involve closer collaboration with European Union authorities, who will be able to take this project to the next level of its effectiveness.

Such a commitment, on behalf of the European Union, will further enhance the Commission's mission to end all forms of violence against women, which is made clear by its plan for Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019.

We must continue to strive, to create a European Union in which all women and girls are safe, and to create a model for the rest of the world. Women and girls must feel confident that their nations are deeply committed to ensure their protection, to promote their empowerment, and to nurture their holistic wellbeing.

Thank you for your attention.