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## MISSION REPORT

following the mission to the United States of the America: 67<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Statues of Women, New York, and Washington D.C., 6-10 March 2023

Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

Members of the mission:

Robert Biedroń	(S&D) (Leader of the mission)
Frances Fitzgerald	(PPE)
Sirpa Pietikäinen	(PPE)
Evelyn Regner	(S&D)
Heléne Fritzon	(S&D)
María Soraya Rodríguez Ramos	(Renew)
Monika Vana	(Verts/ALE)

## *Introduction*

In the framework of the draft programme for travel by committee ad hoc delegations outside the European Union for the first half of 2023, the Conference of Presidents, at its meeting of 24 November 2022, authorised the sending of a seven Member ad hoc delegation, including the FEMM Chair, to New York and Washington, D.C., United States of the America (US), provided that the mission did not exceed five days including travel time, on the understanding that a limited language regime of interpretation into one language only applied.

The mission took place on 6-10 March 2023.

## *Context*

The delegation went to take part in the 67th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (the CSW67), focused on ‘Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls’ as well as to participate in side-events, briefings with the EU Ambassador, partners, non-governmental organisations. The mission was combined with a visit to Washington, D.C., with focus on discussing with U.S. authorities and stakeholders the implications of overturning the Roe v. Wade judgement and the policy response.

## *Summary account of meetings*

### New York

#### **Monday, 6 March 2023, 16.15-17.00.**

**Briefing to the Members of the FEMM Committee Delegation by H.E. Mr Olof Skoog, Ambassador, Head of EU Delegation to the UN in New York.**

#### Also present:

Mr Alexandre Stutzmann, Minister, Parliamentary Relations with the United Nations,  
Mr Klemen Zumer, First Councillor at the EU Delegation,  
Ms Hanne Carle, Political Officer in the Human Rights and Social Affairs Section at the EU Delegation,  
Ms Alexandra Trant, Adviser in the Human Rights and Social Affairs Section at the EU Delegation to the UN

**Members of the delegation** in their introductory remarks presented the most recently adopted documents by the European Parliament (EP) in the area of gender equality and women’s rights, such as Women on boards and Pay transparency directives, as well as an ongoing work on Combating violence against women and domestic violence directive and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. They expressed their concerns about backlash against women’s rights, violence against women, including cybercrime and structured violence. The Chair of the FEMM delegation presented the EP resolution of 15 February 2023 on the EU priorities for the CSW67.

**Ambassador H.E. Mr Olof Skoog** started his briefing by underlining that it was too early to

talk about the outcome of the negotiations on the conclusions of the CSW67. He continued overviewing the context, in which these negotiations were taking place. He said it was a perfect storm, the accumulation of the number of crises: war in Ukraine with all following challenges in the areas of energy and economics, as well as still very acute economic consequences of the pandemic, other conflicts and climate crisis. In these situations, women and girls are the first to suffer. The Ambassador continued by stating that this year the focus was on development. As to the backlash against women's rights, he agreed to that, but added that the picture was mixed and that, comparing with 20-30 years ago, the situation was still positive. Around 5000 participants, mostly women, from all over the world came to attend the CSW67. Some were coming from countries where the situation was not good. The UN Secretary General was concerned about gender bias in the AI area, therefore, the Global Digital Compact and the Code of conduct for information integrity on digital platforms were being launched. He stressed the importance of having stronger multilateral forums and that without private sector or civil society we would not achieve all goals.

**Adviser Ms Alexandra Trant** presented a new approach of the facilitator of the negotiations on the conclusions of the CSW67 and the timeline of the negotiations. She underlined that there was a clear division between development vs human rights based approaches.

**Monday, 6 March 2023, 17.00-18.30.**

**Meeting with the Vice-President of the Commission for Values and Transparency, Ms Věra Jourová, and the European NGOs.**

After the introductory remarks of the Vice-President Ms Jourová and the Chair of the FEMM delegation, the representative of the European NGOs shared their comments.

**Ms Malpuri Groth, Director of the Swedish Women's Lobby**, stressed that women's right were under attack, however, despite that, women were still leading technological and digital revolution. **Ms Pille Tsopp-Pagan, Executive Manager of Women's Support and Information Centre (Estonia)** was talking about gender-based violence and the difficulties some women were facing to leave their abuser, while **Ms Krista Mulenok, Secretary General of Estonian Atlantic Treaty Association**, called for the EU and NATO cooperation on gender equality issues. **The representative of the Danish NGO** focused on women's role in technologies, stressing that women would be better protected if women developed technologies. **Ms Marta Smolíková from Czech Women's Lobby** talked about the issues of migrant women, as well as cyber and online violence, which was getting worse and there was a lack of tools to stop this. **Ms Ana Sofia Fernandes, President of Plataforma Portuguesa para os Direitos das Mulheres**, addressed the issue of fair digital transition, as well as budgeting issues and a need for resources to achieve gender equality. **The representative of the French Women's Lobby** called for a stronger stance of the EU against commodification of women's bodies in digital space, against digitalisation of prostitution, and pornography. **Ms Judit Regős, Founder and Director of Parents' House Public Benefit Foundation (Hungarian)** was talking about bigger involvement of men to help women. **Ms Isabella Szukits, Project Manager Südwind (Austrian)** was raising issues of the role of women in production and human rights in supply chain. **Ms Iluta Lāce, Resource Center for Women MARTA (Latvian)** talked about prostitution, pornography and surrogacy, as well as about Ukrainian refugees. **Representative of European Women's Lobby** called to make campaigning safer for women ahead of elections and raised issues of trolling and attacks on women candidates.

Other raised points during the exchange: women were forgotten in digital revolution, because when power moves in, women are forced out; states should take more responsibility regarding the share of unpaid work and affordable care services; difficulties to enter male dominated technological sectors; prevention that AI driven society and new challenges would to amplify inequalities; issues of internet access, not just high speed and affordable access, but also relevant content and policies; limitations of some of civil society organisations (CSOs) in internet access had impacted their ability to serve their communities; how to connect the unconnected through innovative models. One of the NGOs presented their campaign about how to read the signs and detect signals of cyber violence (for example, when a partner takes over digital life of a woman). They made videos and published them online, but Meta took them away. It was also underlined that companies were mapping every part of life and people were losing control of technologies.

**Members of the delegation** responded to the shared comments. The Chair of the FEMM delegation talked about the role of education of boys and men in supporting women. Other Members talked about progress on the Istanbul Convention and on the Combating violence against women and domestic violence directive, where the EP wants to be ambitious, about cybercrimes, problems with definition of rape and consent, feminist foreign policy, backlash, including against LGBTIQ+ community, legislation on children's sexual abuse, women's economic empowerment, underreporting of harassment online, the need of the better training of judicial authorities, hate speech online, prostitution, pornography.

**The Vice-President of the Commission for Values and Transparency Ms Věra Jourová** responded to the comments by stating that the EU was on a good track to achieve global standards to fight violence against women, but there were some pushbacks by men in power, so she called to "invade" these men's agendas. We cannot correct pushbacks by legislation, she said, so we need actions and we need involvement of the whole society. Technologies should work for women, therefore, we would need more women where technologies are being developed. She underlined the importance of education and education systems. We need to develop also capacities to check if there is bias in AI, the Vice-President said. She called for equality by design. We have modern technologies, but old concepts, biases remain. She informed that the Commission was preparing recommendation to Member States on how to strengthen the position of NGOs.

**Tuesday, 7 March 2023, 9.15-9.45.**

**Informal meeting with the Danish Minister for Digitalisation and Gender Equality Ms Marie Bjerre.**

Also present:

Members of the Danish parliament:

Ms Trine Bramsen, MP, Social Democrats;

Ms Astrid Carøe, MP, The Green Left;

Ms Rosa Lund, MP, The Red-Green Alliance;

Ms Solbjørg Jakobsen, MP, The Liberal Alliance

**Danish Minister for Digitalisation and Gender Equality Ms Marie Bjerre** talked about the importance of ensuring accessibility to technologies for everyone. She addressed the issue of

digital divide and the importance of education. Digitalisation could mobilise women and give them a platform to be heard, she said, but it could cause threats as well. Women could be refrained from speaking out, because of online harassment or spyware could be installed and hidden everywhere. Digital world is constantly evolving and bringing new technologies. We have to be aware of that, she said. In Denmark, there was a law prohibiting of sharing intimate photos and recently a new law prohibiting grooming was proposed. It was important to ensure proper legislation. People have to be taught how to behave online. Important to train and raise awareness. Talking about bias of AI, she underlined that it had to reflect the diverse reality, not to reflect old stereotypes and repeat traditional perceptions. In fact, digital solutions could help to break those stereotypes. So there issues are priorities for Denmark, she said. Talking about women's rights, the Minister underlined safeguarding abortion rights and talked about paternity leave and equal involvement of men and women as caregivers.

**Members of the Danish parliament** informed that they have prepared a declaration about abortion rights.

**Members of the delegation** informed the Danish delegation about an ongoing work on the Combating violence against women and domestic violence directive and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, they addressed issues on how to ensure that women would be more present in digital area, multilateralism and feminist foreign policy. The Chair of the FEMM delegation called for the standardisation of women's rights, which was a key issue.

**Tuesday, 7 March 2023, 10.00-11.30.**

**Participation at the EU-Sweden Ministerial High-Level Side Event “A gender equal world with technologies, digitalisation and AI – what is our roadmap?”. FEMM Chair Mr Robert Biedroń was a panellist.**

The side event was aimed to reflect on a path towards a future in the digital age that addresses the challenges of our times in ensuring gender equality and empowerment of women and girls in all their diversity and prevents risks to human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The side event was moderated by Ms Melissa Fleming, UN Under-Secretary General for Global Communications. Opening remarks were delivered by the Swedish Minister Ms Paulina Brandberg and the Vice-President of the Commission for Values and Transparency Ms Věra Jourová.

The panellists of the side event included Mr Amandeep Singh Gill, UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology, Ms Silas Ngayaboshhya, Director General of Promotion and Women Empowerment in the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion in Rwanda, Mr Robert Biedroń, FEMM Chair of the EP, Mr Peter Micek, General Counsel and UN Policy Manager for Access Now, and Ms Cindy Southworth, Head of Women's Safety at Meta (Facebook).

Panellists called for the urgency of our challenges to be addressed with solidarity, and harness the development of the Global Digital Compact, co-chaired by Sweden and Rwanda, to counteract gender-based violence, gender biases and stereotypes in AI, and the global gender digital divide.

Mr. Biedroń noted that solutions must be developed faster to keep up with the fast-paced ever-

evolving digital sphere, so as to leave no one behind.

The event resulted in several recommendations from speakers and the audience, many of which entailed multi-stakeholder collaboration.

**Tuesday, 7 March 2023, 11.45-12.30.**

**Meeting with H.E. Ms Maria del Carmen Squeff (Argentina), Vice-Chair designate of the CSW67, facilitator of the CSW conclusions**

**Ambassador H.E. Ms Maria del Carmen Squeff** presented her work in facilitating negotiations and said that she was doing this in close partnership with the EU. Argentina and the EU are great allies on gender issues and they both belonged to the Group of Friends for elimination of violence against women and girls. She presented the new approach of negotiations, by keeping some paragraphs closed. She informed that the first reading last week went well, with all countries presenting their comments. Access to technologies for women and girls was a key issue. Some women and girls live in poverty and have no access to computers or phones, therefore, they have no access to digital literacy. She also raised the issue of gender-based violence. It is crucial to address this in order to create a safe space. She addressed the division between human rights and development approaches, which was artificial, she said, since both of them must go together. She said that the part on education, which was very important, was in the document of the CSW67 conclusions. The Ambassador also talked about visibility and said that, although sexual abuse was visible, its victims were invisible. She also focused on paragraphs on infrastructure, which were important for African countries. Many paragraphs on family were very conservative with family as basic social unit, but progressive position on diverse families would not be accepted.

**Members of the delegation** talked about the EU care strategy, job opportunities, economic and financial independence of women, fight against sexual abuse of children, about the review theme of the CSW67 on the empowerment of rural women and girls, about the role of companies.

**Tuesday, 7 March 2023, 14.30-15.15.**

**Meeting with Ms Hannan Sulieman, UNICEF Deputy Executive Director, Management**

**UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Ms Hannan Sulieman** said that we need the whole community, not just women, talking about gender equality. Women and children are the first to feel the consequences of the impact of climate change, war, poverty. Abuse of children online is a very important issue for UNICEF, she said. UNICEF maintains position that protection of children is more important than data protection. She stressed the need to work with private sector, which is an ally. She also stressed that UNICEF is very concerned about Ukraine. In a crisis like Ukraine, there are a lot of gender specific issues. She pointed out the need to invest a lot for the sexual abuse prevention. We should build capacities to deal with that, Ms Sulieman stressed. She also addressed the issue of separated children. UNICEF does not support adoption and is in favour of reunification with parents. War in Ukraine will have lasting impact for many years. Crisis does not stay within borders. It has a global impact. UNICEF's Gender Action Plan, which helps to advance gender equality in the priority areas of UNICEF, was also presented. This Plan serves as a basis in the negotiations of the CSW67 conclusions. Afghanistan issue

was also raised. Girls' future collapsed in one night, but we need to keep this high on the agenda and UNICEF continues advocating on the right of women and girls to have access to work and education. She concluded by calling for advocacy on all fronts and for a common position.

**Members of the delegation** talked about the rights of children, about their protection in war, about gender-based violence, including cyber-violence, about situation in Ukraine and Afghanistan. The Chair of the FEMM delegation presented the EP resolution adopted before the CSW67, where the EP presented its input on the education of girls, on the issue of refugees from Ukraine and on the access of girls to IT. He also said that the EP saw the global Spotlight Initiative of the UN to eliminate violence against women and girls as a very important project. He informed that the EU responded to displacement from Ukraine by triggering the Temporary Protection Directive. This not only gave protection, but also provided access to education for children, access to health services, as well as other basic needs, to everyone.

**Tuesday, 7 March 2023, 15.30-16.15.**

**Meeting with Mr Amandeep Singh Gill, UN Envoy on Technology**

**Members of the delegation** were interested in learning more about the UN plans to ensure access to IT for everyone and how to secure gender equality in doing that. They talked about girls in robotics and coding, virtual space without violence towards women, equality in participation in technological sector, the lack of presence of women in AI and bias in AI, gender gap in STEM sector, intergenerational dialogue, social responsibility of internet, ILO standards, and the protection of children.

**UN Envoy on Technology Mr Amandeep Singh Gill** said that the Secretary General of the UN wanted to give priority to technology and science driven policy in all areas, including gender equality area. He talked about AI governance, about progress in implementing SDGs and not just addressing digital divide. He stressed green transition, capacity building, digital public infrastructure. He also talked about coherence and coordination of all UN entities: UNICEF, UNDG and so on. His job was to bring them all together. He underlined open source promotion within the UN and making it fit for purpose in digital space. He informed about discussions with the Commission about common blueprint for digital transformation. The UN and the EU are partners and aim to drive progress together. He presented the Global Digital Compact, which was agreed by Member States, with Sweden and Rwanda being co-facilitators. Consultation phase would end in June and ministers would meet in September. He said he was listening to input and ideas, but it was too early to say what a final result would look like. There was a strong political framework and there was a big support from the EU, the Global South, Brazil, Ethiopia. There were eight themes of the Global Digital Compact and all had gender aspect. He ensured that he worked closely with the UN Women. Talking about safety side, he underlined the importance of balance of democracy and freedom of expression: misinformation, disinformation, hate speech. All this vs free speech. However, we needed to be careful with content control, he warned. He also talked about manufacturing capacities of devices and the importance of the demand side. It was important to look into who was creating and consuming content, for example, ChatGPT, as it could contain bias. Education is the biggest weapon against delusion and abuse. There was also an issue of connectivity: 2.7 billion people were not connected. There were not enough incentives for girls to take STEM studies in North America and Europe. It was important to bring diversity to this area, because women bring different way of thinking and solving issues. He addressed intersectionality in the technology facilitated

gender-based violence. He talked about China and its priorities in development vs. human rights. However, China wanted to support the Global Digital Compact process, wanted to engage. He also added that he wanted to sharpen accountability of private sector, not enough meaningful action on private content. For example, gaming industry and certain depiction of women, their sexualisation. He said that code of conduct was needed. Another issue was age-appropriate design. Age detections was needed, because of the impact on children.

### **Tuesday, 7 March 2023, 16.30-17.30.**

#### **Meeting with European NGOs**

**Members of the delegation** in their introductory remarks presented the EP resolution on the EU priorities for the CSW67 and addressed such issues as SRHR, abortions, trafficking, intersectionality and multiple discrimination.

**Ms Réka Sáfrány, President of European Women's Lobby**, talked about the upcoming elections and how it was important that women were placed in electable positions. Parity should be mandatory on election lists. She talked about feminist economy, about care policies and the importance of gender budgeting in the MFF. She also said that many EU countries were experiencing backlash. It was important to analyse the situation and to fight back. **Ms Konstantina Vardaramatou, Secretary General of European Women's Lobby**, called for a stronger legislation. She said that surrogacy, sexual exploitation, prostitution and pornography should be criminalised, denial of access to abortions should be penalised. She also added that they were facing some challenges regarding intersectionality, therefore they were putting extra efforts. **Ms Olga Persson, President of UNIZON**, expressed her dissatisfaction with the first draft of the CSW67 conclusions. It was missing such issues as the dark side of internet, sexual abuse of children and pornography. Women were sold as commodities. **Ms Lucie Daniel, Advocacy Expert of EQUIPOP**, said that their core issue was SRHR. She addressed the backlash issue, feminist foreign policy and the funding of anti-gender movements by Russia and the US. **Ms Clara Berglund, Secretary General of Swedish Women's Lobby**, addressed the issues of intersectionality in practice and surrogacy. She said that while some tried to control women's bodies, others tried to sell and exploit them. **Ms Jenny Westerstrand, Chairwoman and President of ROKS**, focused on shelters for women, talked about institutionalisation of gender equality and that more research on gender-based violence was needed. **Ms Elina Eickstädt, Coordinator for the "Stop Chat Control!" (Stop Scanning Me in Germany) campaign from CHAOS COMPUTER CLUB, STOP SCANNING ME**, said that she represented ethical hackers' organisations and she expressed her concern about silo thinking and a lack of connection. She said it was crucial to have safe infrastructure in order to have safe internet. Now there were stalkers with spyware on women's phones. **Ms Maren Heltsche, Special representative for the policy field of digitalisation from FRAUENRAT, DIGITALMEDIA WOMEN**, was emphasising prevention part and said that it was important that algorithms would not to replicate discrimination. She was saying that bots seeded hatred and this could enhance hate content on internet. **Ms Elisa Lindinger, Co-Founder and Managing Director of SUPERRR LAB**, talked about feminist digital future, that women and girls needed access to digital sphere, but it was important to prevent harm to women in digital sphere. She also talked about the regulation of big tech companies.

### **Tuesday, 7 March 2023, 17.40-18.10.**



## **Meeting with Ms Amina J. Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General.**

**UN Deputy Secretary-General Ms Amina J. Mohammed** apologised on behalf of the Secretary-General of the UN, who had to cancel the planned meeting with the delegation, because he urgently needed to travel to Ukraine.

**Members of the delegation** made their introductory remarks. The Chair of the FEMM delegation said that the EU wanted to lead by example and it was a reference point for democracy. He talked about standardisation of women's rights and expressed the support to the Spotlight Initiative. Other members raised issues of gender-based violence online and offline, backlash, gender mainstreaming, bigger gender gap after the pandemic, education and digital literacy, the role of NGOs and their lack of resources.

**UN Deputy Secretary-General Ms Amina J. Mohammed** said that the global Spotlight Initiative was the largest initiative on gender-based violence. It was important to put money behind it. She mentioned the on-going EU audit and she called for synergy and continued partnership in order to avoid fragmentation. She said the UN wanted to inspire and to call for action. The UN provided lots of services through CSOs in Europe. Talking about social media, she said it could play good and bad roles. She also addressed the situation in Ethiopia: Tigray and Amhara, gender-based violence in conflict, separated families. To get things done, we needed partnerships, she said. She talked about COVID, vaccinations and their social economic impact. Same with climate crisis and food production. Developing countries were frustrated about promises not being delivered. She stressed that every investment was an investment in women. She agreed that education and digital literacy were foundation for closing digital divide.

### **Wednesday, 8 March 2023, 10.00-12.00.**

#### **CSW67 Official Meetings: Commemoration of International Women's Day**

The delegation attended the official Commemoration of International Women's Day. Eyewitness News anchor Ms Sade Baderinwa delivered welcome remarks and hosted a panel with women innovators, politicians, and community advocates.

The opening speeches were delivered by H.E. Mr António Guterres, Secretary-General of the UN (in his absence his address was delivered by his Chief of Cabinet), H.E. Mr Csaba Kőrösi, President of the 77th Session of the General Assembly of the UN, H.E. Ms Mathu Joyini (South Africa), Chair of the CSW67, Ms Sima Sami Bahous, UN Under-Secretary-General and UN Women Executive Director and Ms Doreen Bogdan-Martin, Secretary-General of The International Telecommunication Union.

Ms Baderinwa moderated a panel discussion with Ms Marie Bjerre, Minister for Digital government and gender equality from Denmark; Ms Gitanjali Rao, a 17-year-old inventor, innovator, author, STEM promoter, and UNICEF Youth Advocate; Ms Irene Mwendwa, Director of Strategic Initiatives and Feminist Movement Program, Policy, and Ms Marion Reimers, a Mexican sports journalist and UN Women Goodwill Ambassador. The panel focused on bridging the digital gender gap and protecting the rights of women in online spaces.

**Wednesday, 8 March 2023, 14.00-14.45.**

**Meeting with Ms Pramila Patten, Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict**

**Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict Ms Pramila Patten** addressed the issue of sexual violence, which skyrocketed in Ukraine due to the war, and not just against women and girls, but also against men and boys. There was sexualised torture used against men and boys. There were also issues of trafficking, sexual exploitation, which were very concerning. She said she reached out to the government of Ukraine and in May last year a framework cooperation agreement was signed with the government of Ukraine. Implementation plan was launched in September by Ukraine, it was endorsed by ministers and the work has started. They were conducting trainings for investigators and prosecutors. They also investigated gaps in legal framework and supported legislative reforms by amending the Criminal code and the Criminal procedure code. She underlined the support from the EU. Ukraine received 6.8 million euros in support and part of it was from the EU. She was advocating for more support. She also addressed the issue of reporting, because a lot of victims did not report about crimes due to the lack of awareness or just because of shame. She also said that before delivering justice to survivors, it was crucial to create an enabling environment, healthcare, including SRHR, legal and psychological support.

**Members of the delegation** presented their remarks. The Chair of the FEMM delegation said that the EP condemned use of rape and sexual violence as weapon of war in every resolution. He ensured that we were close partners and expressed his support to the mandate of Ms Patten. Other Members asked if other conflicts are not being overlooked, they informed about the process of the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in the EU, as well as about the work on other legislation, they talked about long-term trauma for victims, vicious circle of impunity of perpetrators, about women as agents of change, cyber-violence and Temporary protection directive.

**Wednesday, 8 March 2023, 15.00-15.45.**

**Meeting with Ms Ulrika Mod er, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Director of the Bureau of External Relations and Advocacy, UNDP**

Also present:

Ms Raquel Lagunas, UNDP Head of Gender,  
Ms Maria Fare, Partnership Specialist

**Members of the delegation** made their introductory remarks. The Chair of the FEMM delegation talked about obstacles and backsliding. He said that when there was a crisis, women paid the highest price. He informed about the process of the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in the EU and talked about the Spotlight Initiative. Other Members talked about cooperation with NGOs and civil society and the need to have them involved from the start, about the Green Deal, fight for climate and gender equality, gender mainstreaming, financial and economic projects for women, the 'Beyond GDP' initiative, feminist economy, cyber-violence and implementation of SDGs.

**UN Assistant Secretary-General Ms Ulrika Mod er** started her intervention by underlining that a true strategic partnership with the EU is very important for the UN. However, she said

that the EU could sometimes more listen instead of teaching and preaching. She said that they were focusing on global challenges and they aimed at integrating gender equality in their projects, because women were the hardest hit. She said that they were cooperating with NGOs and civil society was usually strongly engaged in various projects. She focused on the situation in Afghanistan and expressed her concern about the loss of the investments from the last 20 years. If we will let it go, we will let Afghan women down, she said.

**UNDP Head of Gender Ms Raquel Lagunas** talked about the cooperation with civil society. She presented the UNDPs Gender Equality Strategy which was adopted last June and which stated that the UNDP would more systematically involve women's organizations. She underlined that we need to do better. UNDP engaged with women's organisations in 100 countries and was learning from their experiences. As to gender mainstreaming, she said that UNDP was learning a lot from the EU, particularly from EIGE. She also presented the UNDP Gender Equality Seal certification, which set standards for gender equality. She informed that the UNDP had a very ambitious package for gender budgeting. She informed about other UNDP initiatives: the created COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker and their plans to create a Network of Feminist Economists.

**UNDP Partnership Specialist Ms Maria Fare** talked about the situation in Africa. There was uneven picture regarding women's presence in parliaments or participation in economics. She said that women were very active in informal economy. UNDP was collaborating with other agencies seeking to increase women's role, for example in politics, which was a priority. UNDP would like to see more women in politics at national, regional and local levels. She talked about the importance of fostering civil society and involving families in addressing certain issues, such as education. UNDP was reaching out to mothers and fathers to stress the importance of education.

**Wednesday, 8 March 2023, 16.45-17.15.**

**Meeting with Ms Sima Sami Bahous, UN Under-Secretary-General and UN Women Executive Director (with participation of EU Youth Delegates)**

**UN Women Executive Director Ms Sima Sami Bahous** started by thanking the EP and the FEMM Committee for support to UN Women. She talked about violence against women online and offline and pushbacks. She thanked for the cooperation in organising comics' exhibition, which showed how young people saw gender equality. She talked about the Istanbul Convention, which sets standards. She talked about Anti-trafficking directive, refugees and internally displaced persons throughout the world and wars, as well as other crisis. She said that women were affect by trafficking the worst. New technologies did not bring only positive things, but also facilitated violence and created new challenges. She talked about the Spotlight Initiative, which was a good tool and it needed to continue. She also talked about SRHR and quotas. She talked about the situation in Afghanistan, where poverty prevailed and there was no public life. She said that the Afghan government was not concerned at all that they were losing money, because women were not working. However, UN Women kept their channels of communication with women in Afghanistan, because the UN has never left the country. She said that pay gap was human rights issue. Women were the one taking care of families and societies. Women even lost more jobs during lockdown and they were regaining them slower than men were.

**Members of the delegation** presented their remarks. The Chair of the FEMM delegation talked about gender-based violence, cyber-violence, the revision of Anti-trafficking directive and expressed his concerns about backlash. Other Members talked about the situation in Ukraine, bigger participation of women in politics, digital poverty and digital divide, digital pay gap, intersectionality, women in economics, gender budgeting, gender impact assessment and care.

**EU Youth Delegates** addressed the issues of youth involvement online, about situation in Afghanistan and Iran, as well as about the importance of education.

### Washington, D.C.

#### Thursday, 8 March 2023, 8.00-8.30

**Meeting with Mr Joe Dunne, Director of the EP Liaison Office (EPLO) in Washington, D.C.**

#### Also present:

Mr Guillaume Rey, Administrator, EPLO Washington, D.C.

Ms Alexandra Cain, Policy Officer Human Rights, EU Delegation to the U.S.

**EPLO Director Mr Joe Dunne** presented the situation and context for the meetings. This FEMM delegation was the first visit of representatives of an EU institution to Washington, D.C. dedicated to abortion rights post Dobbs decision.

#### Thursday, 8 March 2023, 8.30-9.45

**Roundtable with civil society organisations:**

- **Ms Caitlin Horrigan, Senior Director of Global Advocacy, Planned Parenthood Federation of America**
- **Ms Elizabeth Nash, Principal Policy Associate, State Issues, Guttmacher Institute**
- **Ms Kiki Kalkstein, Director, Advocacy and Engagement, Global Health Council**

**Members of the delegation** made their introductory remarks. The Chair of the FEMM delegation presented the resolution of the EP with which the EP would like to express a firm solidarity with and support for women and girls in the US. He also called for standardisation of women's rights. Other Members talked about closer cooperation with pro-choice movements, access to SRHR, abortion rights and possible options to reinstate right to abortion after the Dobbs decision, financing of pro-choice and anti-abortion movements, backlash against women's rights.

**Guttmacher Institute's Principal Policy Associate Ms Elizabeth Nash** talked that there was no national health insurance. Most states had a policy to use their own Medicaid funds to pay for medically necessary abortion care. The situation was difficult as low-income women and women of colour were disproportionately affected. There were severe limitations to abortion access. She said that abortions were unavailable in 15 states, mainly in the South of the US. In addition, in those states where abortions could still be performed, clinics were overloaded with long waiting time of 2-3 weeks. The cost of abortion was 55 dollars and usually it was not

covered, so people paid themselves. More funding was needed. There were as well a lot of myths about abortions that needed to be addressed. She also talked about big variations between states. President Biden issued an executive order in support of abortion rights. Their organisation was involved in protecting patients travelling to other states to get abortion.

**Senior Director of Global Advocacy of Planned Parenthood Federation of America Ms Caitlin Horrigan** indicated that global solidarity on this issue meant a lot. Her organisation was involved in advocacy and providing services. About 70% of Americans were not satisfied with the abortion situation. Their priority was to reclaim the courts by nominations of pro-choice judges. She addressed the issues of attacks on sexual education, as well as a global abortion stigma. The Biden administration could do more on this issue via foreign policy by being more vocal, she said.

**Global Health Council Advocacy and Engagement Director Ms Kiki Kalkstein** talked about the role of the US in multilateral organisations. The country played a strong role and its position and presence was very powerful, she stated.

#### **Thursday, 8 March 2023, 10.30-11.00**

#### **Meeting with House Speaker Emerita Ms Nancy Pelosi (D-California)**

**House Speaker Emerita Ms Nancy Pelosi** started with her comments about Ukraine. She said it was important that the EU took a lead on this. She stressed the importance of working together for human rights around the world. Listening, learning, building consensus, because there were dangers if we would not succeed. Russia was using rape as a weapon of war. In Russia, this was a policy. War brutalised Russian soldiers, they did what they were ordered to do. She underlined that it was important that countries, welcoming refugees from Ukraine, should also provide all the necessary help to raped women who got pregnant. She mentioned Poland in this regard. Another weapon of war that Russia used was stealing children. She said she believed in parliaments working together. Ms Pelosi continued by pointing out that since the founding fathers, the US were expanding freedoms, until the Dobbs ruling. It brought a demoralising effect and it was both a democracy/freedom issue and a kitchen table issue for US families, she added. If she would need to choose just one thing to do, it would be to educate women and girls. It was vital to have family planning. She invited to promote respect for women, to empower women's minds. When women succeed, America succeeds. She also talked about violence against women in Iran, Afghanistan and expressed her concerns about backlash and about the use of technologies and threats to the protection of data. She informed about last year's bill to codify Roe v. Wade, which was impossible to pass with filibuster rule in the Senate. She said that Democrats needed to gain 5 more seats in the Congress and get majority in the Senate. Talking about multilateralism, which was essential, she pointed out that first it was needed to fight corruption in the Global South. Women would have more power if there was no corruption. It was about the money, which contributed to the corrosion of democracy. This affected every aspect of our lives: climate, health, jobs. Follow the money, she added.

**Members of the delegation** made their comments. The Chair of the FEMM delegation confirmed that the US and the EU were close transatlantic allies and that the EU was struck by the overturn of Roe v. Wade. He stressed it was crucial to fight together against the general backlash on women's rights (abortion, violence against women) and proposed to create an informal working group on women's rights between the Congress and the EP (to which Ms

Pelosi responded positively). He shared a warning from Poland: pregnancy register and LGBT-free zones. Other Members talked about backlash and the need to strengthening women's rights and access to abortion. They asked what the EU could do more, they talked about a structured cooperation across the Atlantic on pro-choice movement, asked about efforts to reinstate legal abortion at the Federal level, progress in international negotiations and strengthening multilateralism.

**Thursday, 8 March 2023, 11.45-12.15**

**Meeting with Associate Attorney General Ms Vanita Gupta, Chair of the Reproductive Rights Task Force, Department of Justice**

**Associate Attorney General Ms Vanita Gupta** said that the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division has faced growing urgency to work to protect reproductive services, in part by enforcing the FACE Act, following the Dobbs decision. Following this act, they could prosecute those blocking access to abortion services. Justice Department was engaged in litigations, for example, in actions against Food and Drug Administration regarding abortion medications. She also talked about civil rights division protecting LGBT rights. Her team provided technical assistance to the Congress on legislation. She talked about cyber violence, hate speech online. Justice Department was still thinking how to deal with that and she said that they could learn a lot from the EU. Roe v. Wade was taken for granted, so now they were facing implications of the Dobbs decision, which would be the hardest on low-income women and women of colour. Others could travel, but not those with low-income. However, 75% of abortion patients were of low-income. They had a strong law to protect personal health data. She also said they were meeting regularly with different stakeholders, such as NGOs, legal firms, abortion networks.

**Members of the delegation** made their comments. The Chair of the FEMM delegation presented the resolution of the EP. Access to abortion is a human right, he said and he called to strengthen the cooperation in order to fight back against the global backlash, standardisation of women's rights and the Istanbul Convention. Other Members also talked about cooperation, asked about the protection of personal data in order for women not to be prosecuted.

**Thursday, 8 March 2023, 13.00-13.30**

**Meeting with Ms Katie Keith, Senior Advisor for Health Policy to the Gender Policy Council, Dr Stephanie Psaki, Director for Global Health Response, National Security Council, and Ms Lina Volin, Chief of Staff of the Gender Policy Council, White House**

**Senior Advisor Ms Katie Keith** said that the Gender Policy Council's goal is to mainstream discussions on gender rights. She pointed out that the anti-abortion movement was also connected to the anti-LGBTI movement, and that they saw LGBTI rights as the next battleground issue. She mentioned a recent lawsuit filed by five women in Texas who were either facing life-endangerment themselves or were carrying non-viable foetuses and had been denied abortion access. It was the first time pregnant women themselves had taken legal action against abortion bans (other legal action had come from the Department of Justice and civil society groups). She saw this case as important as it reflected the real-life repercussions of abortion bans and might help to change Texas law to provide clarification for when doctors could provide abortions in the case of life endangerment. She also confirmed the assessment

that the Dobbs decision would be the hardest on low-income women and women of colour.

**Director for Global Health Response Dr Stephanie Psaki** stated that the US would, hopefully, continue being the biggest global donor for family planning and maternal health, depending on funding allocated by the Congress. As regards support for SRHR in multilateral fora, she underscored that the Biden Administration wanted to be helpful and show leadership without being disruptive. She noted that the Administration was discussing its role in the upcoming World Health Assembly with allies and identifying ways it could positively contribute. She added that international pressure on SRHR was important as the Administration took pressure from its allies very seriously.

**Members of the delegation** made their comments. The Chair of the FEMM delegation talked about backlash and the role of men in fighting for gender equality. Other Members asked how the EU could help pro-choice movements, about the impacts of the Dobbs decision, intersectionality, about the funding of anti-choice movements coming from the US and Russia.

**Thursday, 8 March 2023, 14.15-14.45**

**Meeting with House Representative Ms Mary Gay Scanlon (D-Pennsylvania), Member of the Committee on the Judiciary, Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Constitution and Limited Government**

**House Representative Ms Mary Gay Scanlon** said that the US was very divided over abortions issue. Some states were banning abortion right, some were trying to write it into law. Regarding the Dobbs decision, she believed the Supreme Court went too far. She said she looked at the resolution of the EP, which raised a large number of issues where the US and the EU were aligned. However, in the US, there was a bizarre obsession with abortion rights. She also talked about gun violence, free speech. She informed that two bills passed last year in the House, but could not pass the Senate. She informed about their attempts to protect access to other states' abortion services, and to counter GOP attempts to ban access to medication. She stressed that young women are angry. There was a great cooperation with the Biden Administration. She presented the initiative of California where a clinic was opened right in an airport so that women could get abortion service without additional travelling. She also informed about the proposed Equal Rights amendment to the Constitution, which was pending since 1923. There were some glitches in the framework. She called to push back together on the backlash to women's rights as a matter of life, health, human rights.

**Members of the delegation** made their comments. They talked about the overturn of Roe v. Wade, situation in the EU, deeper cooperation, the Istanbul Convention, asked about initiatives to protect women from prosecution, possibilities for women to get abortion in other states where abortion is legal, about cooperation between mayors on abortion.

**Thursday, 8 March 2023, 16.00-16.30**

**Meeting with House Representative Ms Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Texas), Member of the Committee on the Judiciary and of the Caucus on Women's issues, Sponsor of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2021**

**House Representative Ms Sheila Jackson Lee** addressed the situation in Ukraine, where

women being systematically raped. She also talked about the devastating Dobbs decision. Democrats needed to gain 5 more seats in the Congress to make a difference. She informed about the pro-choice caucus in the Congress. Most of Americans support abortion right, she informed. Therefore, there was a need to introduce legislation, which would guarantee women's right to choose. She also talked about doctors. Some of them were intimidated and frightened to perform abortions.

**Members of the delegation** made their comments. They talked about violence against women, the Istanbul Convention, SRHR, cyber violence, structured violence, poverty, how to push back together on the backlash and intensify cooperation, multilateral level of cooperation and civil society.

### **Conclusion**

The priorities and concerns of the EU and the UN are the same in the area of gender equality and women's rights. The international climate towards equality is not improving as fast as needed and there are even pushes to reduce it in many places in the world. In light of the current backlash against gender equality - against women, the LGBTQI+ community and other vulnerable groups - across the EU and worldwide, common actions and joint forces are needed. The EU must lead by example by denouncing this backlash, by empowering women and girls in all their diversity and achieving gender equality in the digital transformation. We need to standardise women's rights at international level and we cannot wait another 60 years to achieve gender equality.

In the meetings in Washington, D.C., the delegation expressed the position that SRHR are fundamental human rights, which must be protected. The delegation also expressed a firm solidarity with and support for women and girls in the US, affected by newly enacted restrictions to abortion rights. The interlocutors appreciated the expressed support and the provided insights into the Parliament's work and its position on the matter, as well as information on the situation in various European countries.