

**Speech by Zita Gurmai
Copenhagen, 24 May**

**Women, Religion and Culture in Europe:
Will women be the cultural battle ground of the 21st century?**

Introduction and thanks

- I would like to welcome you all here to the PES Women annual conference which we have jointly organized with the Danish social democratic party. I would like to express my thanks to our Danish friends, Anne Sofie Allarp and her team.
- I would like to thank and welcome our speakers for today and the chairs of each panel.
- I would also like to thank all the Danish participants here today for showing your interest and support.
- Last but not least, I would like to welcome PES Women members and delegates who have come from all over Europe (from 27 countries) to be here today.

Personal introduction

- I am President of PES Women. I am also an MEP and Vice-Chair of the European Parliament's Women's rights and gender equality committee
- In my own country - Hungary, I am a long-time campaigner for women's rights.
- PES Women is the women's section of the Party of European Socialists and brings together women - MP, MEPs and activists - from member parties of the Party of European Socialists. We meet to discuss and promote gender equality both within the PES and beyond. You will find information about our work in the leaflet.
- I would like to also convey a message from Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, the President of the Party of European Socialists and as you know, former Prime Minister of Denmark from 1993 – 2001.

PES Women anti-trafficking campaign

- We recently organized the biggest campaign in the life of the PES – an electronic petition calling on the European Commission and EU member states to take action to stop the trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation, in particular in the run up to the World Cup in Germany this summer.
- Estimates vary between 40,000 and 100,000 women and girls who will be trafficked into Germany into sexual slavery.
- We collected over 23,000 signatures to our petition and one of your leading trade unions has collected over 60,000 signatures to an anti-trafficking petition.
- I would like to thank all of our parties for their support on this – it is a common baby.

- We also organized a meeting of European social democratic justice and home affairs ministers before their recent Council meeting on 27 April. We succeeded in ensuring that EU justice and home affairs ministers made concrete commitments on fighting trafficking.

Programme

- I wanted to refer to this campaign because not only is it a concrete example of the work of PES Women but it also relates directly to the agenda of our conference today which is “Women, Religion and Culture in Europe”.
- In recent years, there has been some progress in gender equality, some but not enough.
- More and more women are working
- More and more women are going to university and doing better than their male counterparts,
- More and more women are going into politics. In Sweden for example, 45% of MPs are women, and there are parity governments (50% of ministers are women) in the governments from our political family in Norway and Spain.
- HOWEVER, there are two enormous dangers and challenges:
 - Firstly - the progress is far too slow in most of our countries,
 - with too few women able to work because of lack of childcare,
 - women getting paid 15% less on average than men (25% less in the private sector),
 - there are still far too few women in politics, not enough women MPs and not enough women ministers.
- Secondly, and more worryingly, the progress which we have made is under threat.
- Conservative forces, rooted in some readings of religion and some emerging non-religious and cultural movements, are trying to roll back the progress that we have made.
- This is the subject of our conference today.

Brief introduction of the panels

- In the first and second panels we will consider how some readings – I stress “some” not all – of some religions are trying to go back on some of the rights that women have and should be granted.
- We shall see how moderate religious leaders and prominent community women and men can help to counteract this.
- We will also hear how ethnic minority women are affected and the importance of their role in our communities.
- We will consider how the clash of civilizations and increasing tensions between some communities are affecting women.

- In the third panel, we will discuss another form of backlash coming from the non-religious, cultural developments in our society.
- Why domestic violence is so prevalent – with one in five women being subjected to domestic violence in their lifetime and some even, tragically, losing their lives at their hands of their partners.
- Why trafficking, and in particular sexual slavery, is still so widespread and growing, as now the second most profitable, cross-border crime.
- Moreover, how the objectification of women is wrongly becoming an “acceptable” thing in advertising and elsewhere.

- Today is not only a day for us to reflect upon these dangers and challenges, but also to work towards solutions on these complicated and difficult issues.
- Rooted in our social democratic and socialist principles, I believe that the Party of European Socialists and PES Women can provide a progressive approach to these issues.

- I very much look forward to our discussions and thank you once again for your participation.

- I would like to introduce my dear and esteemed colleague from the European Parliament, Britta Thomsen, who will also make an introduction.

.....BRITTA speaks.....

Welcome and introduce Lene Sjørup

- I would like to welcome and introduce Lene Sjørup who is a Danish academic with great expertise in the theme of our conference today.
- We are very grateful to Lene for being here today and look forward to her introductory lecture on the theme:
- Women and the ‘clash of civilisations’: Pawns, Instigators or Peacemakers?
- Lene – you have the floor.