

Opening speech

Eva-Maria Welskop-Deffaa

Director General for Gender Equality of Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth



Ladies and Mr. Tom Wünsche,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you here today in Bonn, to welcome you as the official representative of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Seniors Citizens, Women and Youth. I will say only a few words opening this European Conference bringing the warmest greetings of Ursula von der Leyen, our Minister for Women and Gender equality.

This meeting is the final point of a three years European Learning Partnership project, sponsored by the European Socrates Programme, Grundtvig 2: A project called “Making Women’s History Visible.” My ministry supports the work of the German partner of this project and this conference. We are convinced: It is necessary to make women’s history visible. Invisibility has been the faith of women for too many centuries!

I welcome you all – German and European guests, coming from different countries, from Eastern Europe as well as Western Europe, from Denmark, Spain, Greece, Malta, Austria and Estonia. We know that it is necessary and useful to exchange experiences and ideas, bad practices and success stories. The German EU-Presidency that was finished only yesterday has given us a lot of opportunities to learn from our neighbours, to overcome national borders, to look into foreign fields of experience. The last events of the German EU-Presidency – the summit’s factionalisms – proved: It is essential to share our common European history, to strengthen and deepen the process of reconciliation and we should do this in gender sensitive way.

Your conference is dedicated to the topic: “Women’s Perspectives on the Roots of European History”. On the one hand we expect women’s history to be an integrated part of our history and historical research. On the other hand we know that it is important to detect the own history of women, the female memories, the heritage of our mothers and grandmothers.

A great deal of research has been done in the last decades to “place women into history” or to support efforts “the majority finds its past” (Gerda Lerner). But: Even though there has been done high quality research in women’s history, women’s contributions to history are still invisible regarding the perception of history. Museums, mass media, school books – they are still gender blind or at least male dominated. Empirical studies reveal the lack of women’s history in nearly all public presentations of history. What a shame!

Ladies,

In your programme you have chosen a feminist approach to European history. And: You are going back to the earliest sources of the history of man- and womankind, to the matriarchal cultures of “Old Europe”, to the temples of Malta and to the three matrons here in the Rhineland, showing us an often forgotten and ignored pathway through history.

In your workshops you will discuss ancient women’s history as well as the experiences of women in Europe during the last decades, marked by wars and totalitarian rule, searching for the links between the experiences and times.

You have set up an ambitious goal for your workshops and for your Round Table: “Women’s historical experiences as the foundation of a gender democratic Europe”. This is ambitious for historians but for politicians as well – we, politicians and bureaucrats, we have to build this gender democratic Europe – and as long as there are only 20 % of decision making positions held by women, as long as there is a gender pay gap of 15 to 20 %, gender equality is still not reached in Europe.

It was Angela Merkel who clarified in her Berlin declaration signed 50 years after the Roman treaties, only a few weeks ago by her, José Manuel Barroso and Hans-Gert Pöttering, that gender equality is central for the future development of Europe as a community of values as well as a community of freedom and justice. She shares the expectation that, a feminist future means respecting diversity as well as reaching full equality of women and men.

Let’s work together – historians and politicians, German and European women, women and men to build a bright future, a future of visible women, a future of wealth and freedom.

Good luck for your conference.