



Practising what we preach!

18/04/2018

An all-female (bar two) private office.



Today, members of the European Economic and Social Committee have entrusted me with the leadership of the organisation for the next two and half years. It is a great honour for me to serve the Committee, which I consider to be the home of civil society, the soul of the European project.

I am pleased to say that I will be surrounded by highly-skilled, professional women. It is the first time in the history of the EESC and, as far as I know of the EU institutions, that a president has appointed a woman as head of

their private office. It is the first time that EESC members have elected two women vice-presidents: Isabel Caño Aguilar, responsible for communication, and Milena Angelova, responsible for the budget, will join me at the helm of the EESC.

Sixty years ago, gender equality was enshrined in the Treaty of Rome as one of the EU's fundamental values. Since then we have come a long way in Europe in terms of how we ensure equality between women and men, but a lot more remains to be done.

In the context of persistent economic inequality and rising intolerance it is essential for the EU to reaffirm its strong commitment to gender equality. More than ever, we need to continue to raise awareness of the fact that equality still cannot be taken for granted and to marshal all Member States, civil society and social partners to take political action.

Giving women a greater role is good for the future of Europe. Some see women as having higher emotional intelligence, which could bring certain advantages to any organisation. It can give people an important edge. But it may just be that they have been allowed to develop empathy and express the emotions we all share more freely. We all have a lot to learn. In any case, being able to draw on different ways of managing situations can only be an advantage.

Our traditional way of interpreting character traits that we see as "powerful" or "with leadership potential" need to be redefined to allow for a less traditional vision, which will help us cope with the rising challenges.

We also need to give young women in Europe today role models, female leaders who inspire them to develop their potential.

We must not forget that gender-related issues cut across all societal implications of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, including in the areas of work, education and social relations. I am not the only one to think that there may be potential benefits for traditionally female-oriented jobs arising from the increasing importance of emotional intelligence in the Fourth Industrial Revolution - it is not possible to automate compassion.

A year before the European elections, we need to listen to the people of our continent. Half of them think there should be more women in political decision-making positions, with seven out of ten in favour of legal measures to ensure parity between men and women in politics.

It is time to break the glass ceiling. Many talk about it - I have decided to do it. We must practice what we preach.

On the photo: Luca Jahier (president) with (from left to right) Katherine Heid, Daniela Rondinelli, Urszula Sofidis, Ulrika Arvidsson Velasquez, Gabriela Hausmann, Bianca Cozar, Stefano Martinelli, Alicja Herbowska, Alessandra Spalletta and Daniela Vincenti.