

Welcome speech by  
Leena Linnainmaa  
President of EWLA

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**Distinguished Key Speaker Madame Eva Joly,  
Distinguished Representatives of European Institutions,  
Presidents of National Women Lawyers Associations,  
Dear Colleagues**

It is a great honour and pleasure to wish you all welcome to the 9<sup>th</sup> congress of EWLA in Reykjavik. We have participants from approximately 20 countries

The theme of our congress is European Lawmaking and Practice – Fundamental Rights and Financial Markets. Considering the theme and the present financial situation, the congress city is certainly very well-chosen. And the congress city and theme were chosen so early that we had no knowledge of the present situation at the time of the choice!

This is a very good time to come to Iceland. We all have read and heard about the challenges that Iceland faces. By coming here we can express our support to our Icelandic colleagues. Under the present circumstances it was wonderful that the Icelandic Women Lawyers Association was able to invite us yesterday to the Blue Lagoon. If any of you did not join us, you certainly missed a lot!

EWLA is very active in promoting women in decision-making. We are represented at the European Commission's network of women in decision-making.

It was interesting to follow that after the Icelandic banks had collapsed, it was time to choose women leaders to sort out the difficult situation. So Iceland saw women CEO's chosen to its banks. I certainly hope that in the future, such dramatic circumstances are not needed before women are chosen to be CEO's of large companies. In fact, this is quite necessary for Europe. Ample evidence shows that companies with women on the top are more profitable than companies with less than the average amount of women in top positions. We will handle this issue in one of the several resolutions that the General Assembly of EWLA will adopt in its meeting tomorrow.

In order to promote gender equality, we need role models. The first Honorary Member of EWLA was a role model for countless women all over the world. *Dr Helvi Sipilä* died at the age of 94 on 15 May 2009.

Helvi Sipilä qualified in 1939 as Master of Laws. She was the second woman in Finnish history to open her own practice as a lawyer in 1943, often representing women in court cases. In 1972 she became Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations – the first woman to hold this post. During her almost ten years of service, she led the United Nations in declaring 1975 International Women's Year and was instrumental in the first world conference for the advancement of women, the predecessor to the Nairobi and Beijing conferences. Ms Sipilä also set up UNIFEM, the UN fund supporting women in developing nations.

In 1982 she was the first woman to be a Finnish Presidential candidate. Ms Sipilä held honorary doctorates from 12 universities. Helvi Sipilä became the first recipient of the International Bar Association's Outstanding International Woman Lawyer Award in 2001. In Finland she held the title Minister.

She was a founding member of the Finnish Women Lawyers Association in 1945. In 1954-1956 she was President of the International Federation of Female Lawyers, to mention just a few of her numerous leading positions in NGO's.

On 5 May 2005 Helvi Sipilä was elected by the board as EWLA's first Honorary Member to celebrate her 90th anniversary.

I would like to invite you to a moment of silence in Helvi Sipilä's memory.

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Back to promoting equality which was Helvi's lifelong achievement.

We are very pleased with the active approach of the EU to promote gender equality. We certainly urge the EU to continue its efforts also after the recent European Parliament elections. The amount of women MEP's rose to 35 percent from 31 per cent. So we are seeing progress. What remains to be seen is how many women Commissioners we will have. Currently, one third of the Commissioners are women. I hope that the figure will increase.

However, it should be recognized that there are many men who promote gender equality. Commissioner Vladimír Špidla is an excellent example. Whether his successor will be a man or a woman, the most important thing is that the Commissioner will continue the active approach that Mr Špidla has taken.

One concrete issue for the new Commission will be the new Roadmap for Equality. The present roadmap is for years 2006-2010. Needless to say, among the numerous statements and resolutions that EWLA has given, one covers the roadmap. But now is the time to work for the future. A new roadmap will be given and it is essential that concrete, proactive measures will be included in it. EWLA will follow the process closely.

Another good reason for Iceland to be the venue of our congress is Iceland's interesting system of parental leaves. Under the Icelandic model fathers are entitled to three months of parental leave in their own right which is not transferable to the mother. Almost all Icelandic fathers use their entitlement to take three months' parental leave remunerated at a rate of 80% of their usual salary. This is the most generous system in Europe for fathers. This has led to a high birth rate in Iceland, in fact much higher than in Austria, Germany, Czech, Lithuania, Italy, Malta, Greece or Spain. If Europe wishes to see a positive change in its demographic development, supporting and strengthening the role of fathers could prove to be a useful measure. The Icelandic model deserves careful consideration in that regard. I hope that Iceland will be able to keep its model under the present financial challenges.

EWLA was established in 2000. This means that next year we will celebrate the 10 year anniversary. This will take place in Brussels on 4-5 June 2010. This is an invitation and I hope to see all of you there!

A few personal notes: this is my final speech as President of EWLA. It is about time to have a change. I am the only remaining EWLA board member and after two terms as President, it is time to retire. Tomorrow the General Assembly of EWLA will elect a new President. I wish her all success in the challenging task. I have found these years since 2001 very motivating. I have met interesting people and seen places that otherwise I would not get to go to. Of course, running an NGO without public financing is quite a challenge. So I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my employer, the Central Chamber of Commerce of Finland for the unbelievable support, understanding and flexibility during my time on EWLA board, not least in 2003 when I organized the EWLA congress in Helsinki. It is easy, however, to leave EWLA board in full confidence to the capable hands of other women lawyers. I will continue to promote women in decision-making, including e.g. women director training in Namibia and Morocco.

It is a tremendous effort to organize an international congress on a voluntary basis. On behalf of EWLA I wish to offer our deepest gratitude to all of those who made this event possible, including our speakers and congress organizers, especially our Icelandic Vice-President Herdís Thorgeirsdóttir, and the Icelandic Women Lawyers Association. The circumstances under the current financial situation caused major challenges in the organization in this congress.

I am confident that our efforts will produce a successful congress. I expect a lively discussion – as always at EWLA congresses. Networking among colleagues is also an essential part of our congresses. Tomorrow, the General Assembly of EWLA will be held. As always, we intend to give resolutions on important subjects.

I wish you all interesting days in Reykjavik!