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EWLA Board, Finland

EWLA Congress in Cooperation with Women Lawyers in Finland
Helsinki, Finland, 6-8 June, 2003
THE FUTURE OF EUROPE: Enlargement

Dear Colleagues

On behalf of EWLA I wish you all welcome at our congress The Future of Europe. We have speakers and participants from more than 20 countries.

EWLA was established in March 2000 in Berlin. Since then we have held congresses in Sevilla and Paris and a dissemination conference in Brussels. This year we meet in Helsinki.

EWLA's aim is to promote gender equality in the European Union. Through EWLA women lawyers from different nations can join forces and use their expertise. Also here in Helsinki we can collect information about good and bad experiences in different countries and thus create recommendations for best practises. We will also prepare resolutions on some of our topics.

People in Finland often think that Finland is model country for gender equality. It is true that we have many advantages but fact remains that for example gender violence is more common in Finland than in many other EU member states. We actually have fewer women in leading positions in our ministries than any other EU country, even though the proportion of women in the parliament and in the cabinet of ministers is exceptionally high. So this congress offers also our Finnish colleagues possibilities to get new ideas.

Gender equality must be an important value in the future of Europe. Its importance will even increase due to the enlargement of the EU. Ten new member states will profit from EU gender equality legislation. It is self-evident that the enlargement will have a major impact on the EU. An

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essential goal of this congress is to remind of the importance of gender equality also in the future.

Tomorrow afternoon we will have a workshop on the Draft Constitutional Treaty of the European Union. We are painfully aware of the fact that the Draft Constitutional Treaty ignores gender equality as a value of the EU. Consequently, the work of the European Convention cannot be considered successful. Even though the EU faces new challenges on the brink of enlargement, gender equality should not be set aside. On the contrary, in the near future the EU could promote gender equality also in the new member states.

I greet with great pleasure one of our participants. In her position as United Nations Assistant Secretary General Helvi Sipilä worked relentlessly to ameliorate women's situation in the world. She later became the first female presidential candidate in Finland and in 2001 received the first Outstanding International Woman Lawyer Award of the International Bar Association.

It is my privilege to announce our Saturday morning opening program. The opening speech will be given by Cherie Booth QC. She is EWLA's founding member and is married to the British Prime Minister Tony Blair. The morning program will start at 9 am in this room and if you wish to attend it, please be seated by 9 o'clock.

I wish to use this opportunity to express our gratitude to our sponsors and volunteers, among them members of Women Lawyers Association Finland and law students from the university of Helsinki. Without their contributions this event would not be possible. In order to keep costs as low as possible, we have not employed any professional congress organizer but done everything ourselves.

I sincerely hope that our congress will be a success and a beginning to fruitful relations to women lawyers in the new EU member states.