

Speaking points

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Introduction

- Thank you very much for the invitation to this conference. It is of particular interest for the Commission as research addressing sex and gender in biomedical sciences and health research is a novel and highly promising field.
- The interaction of sex and gender related mechanisms leads to different manifestation of diseases; infarction, heart failure, diabetes and rheumatic disease express themselves differently in women and in men.
- Research in this area will lead to better targeted and therefore more efficient treatment strategies than the previous 'one-size fits all' approach thereby creating opportunities for prevention and increasing healthy life expectancy.
- And, it is my pleasure to be here and speak about gender in research. But first, let me turn to gender mainstreaming and update you on the recent activities of the Commission in relation to the field of medical research.
- I'll preface this by saying that I think there is still a lot to do to reach the gender mainstreaming goals in research – but we're making some real progress.

Gender mainstreaming and EU Prizes for Women Innovators

- For example, according to the "She Figures" report published by the European Commission, women represent only 33% of European researchers, 20% of full professors and 15.5% of heads of institutions in the Higher Education sector.
- Similarly, on average, women make up 30% of the entrepreneurs in the EU, and they often face greater difficulties than men in starting up businesses and in accessing financial support and training.
- Therefore, the Commission has taken some actions to address these inequities. As one outcome of these, at the European Commission Innovation Convention on 10 March in Brussels, President Barroso awarded the EU Prizes for Women Innovators to three outstanding winners from the

life science and health sector who have shown that women can successfully bridge the gap between science and business.

- The first prize winner is Saskia Biskup (Germany), co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of CeGaT GmbH, a leading biotech company for diagnostic gene panels, a major step forward in diagnosing patients with rare diseases.
- The second prize winner is Laura van 't Veer (The Netherlands), co-founder and Chief Research Officer at Agendia NV and a leading personalised health company creating diagnostic tests that foretells the risk of recurrence for breast cancer patients.
- The third prize winner is Ana Maiques (Spain), co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of Starlab, a leading research and innovation company focused on the space and neuroscience industries based in Barcelona.
- They have forged remarkable careers in innovation and brought their ideas to market by becoming entrepreneurs. I hope that their achievements will inspire many other women students, researchers, entrepreneurs and innovators to follow in their footsteps.
- Given the great success of the first contest in 2011 and the current edition, it shows the need for such a prize. Despite some advances in recent years, women in research and entrepreneurship remain a minority. This is a waste of talent that we cannot afford.
- We have to foster gender equality and also raise the profile of successful women innovators. Therefore, we are exploring the option of continuing the contest until the day when we won't need a specific prize for women scientists and innovators because the opportunities, rewards and recognition will be gender neutral in all areas of research and business.
- But having said this, there is already an example in health research, which shows that things are moving already. May be you know that the Commission has recently set up independent expert advisory groups for providing high level external advice to the Commission in all fields of research.
- And this time the composition of the new health research advisory group has even more women than men (18 women and 13 men). This is only possible because women are now, step by step, reaching high level positions in research and society.

Gender dimension in biomedical research

- Now, I would like to come to the second point of my intervention, which is the gender dimension in research:
- This is also very high on the Commissions' agenda and I am happy for the opportunity to update you on the current developments in our new framework programme for research Horizon 2020.
- I should also mention that for us, gender issues are implicit in medical research, and in most of our FP7 projects, wherever applicable, this has been taken into account.
- Under Horizon 2020, research needs to respond to different societal challenges, one being 'health, demographic change and wellbeing challenge', which is probably of most interest to this audience and the EUGenMED project. I should add, though, that health research is also supported in many other parts of our programme, like the ERC grants, fellowships and more.
- Within the new programme, applicants are requested to give much more attention to sex and gender differences in health research. Therefore it is now mandatory for applicants to address these issues as part of the scientific description in each proposal.

The EUGenMed project

- And, this is where the EUGenMed project comes in, as it aims to produce an innovative road map for implementing sex and gender differences in biomedicine and health research. The EUGenMed results are expected to inform political input as well as to help tailoring sex and gender aspects in health research and for medical practise.
- Even though gender equality is a key priority for Commissioner Máire Geoghegan–Quinn and gender issues in research are now substantially reinforced, we count on EUGenMed's results to help improve the situation further.

Overview – how the gender dimension is addressed in Horizon 2020 research

- I will give you an overview of what has been recently introduced in the new programme:
- As compared to FP7 gender aspects appear in three ways, in terms of

- 1) Gender balance in decision-making,
- 2) Balanced participation of female and male scientists in research teams and
- 3) Enforcing the gender dimension in research and innovation content.

Enforcing the gender dimension in research and innovation content

- Enforcing the gender dimension - what do we mean by this? If we really want to achieve excellence, we cannot afford to ignore the gender dimension that has been proven to be an important aspect in biomedical research.
- It has to be clear that sex and gender analysis will improve the quality of research and the societal relevance of the produced knowledge, technology and innovation.
- Now under Horizon 2020, the gender dimension is explicitly integrated from the beginning – a significant departure from FP7, where so far only 28% of finalised health research projects have indicated a gender dimension.
- In the Horizon 2020 work programme for 2014-2015 more than 100 topics are flagged as "gendered" topics, this means that gender issues are explicitly mentioned in the topic. The work programme for the societal challenge of "health, demographic change and well-being" has 17 "gendered" topics.
- And this is just the minimum – it does not prevent the applicants from including gender issues in proposals to non-flagged topics. In the application forms applicants are requested to describe how sex and/or gender analysis is taken into account in the project's content, scientific concept and approach.

"Gendered Innovations" report

- During the last two years an expert group has built resources on the gender dimension and this led to the publication in 2013 of a report entitled "Gendered Innovations" which included several case studies for gender in health & medicine – you can find more on the related website.
- It is a pleasure for me to see that Professor Ineke Klinge, the rapporteur of the "Gendered Innovations" report, Professor Vera Regitz – Zagrosek from the Charité Institute for Gender Medicine and Peggy Maguire and Hildrun Sundseth from the European Institute of Women's Health are taking part in this work as it continues. It is good to see research groups teaming up

with health organisations, such as the EIWH. The expected results of the EUGenMed project will be a much-needed follow-up.

- We believe that scientists themselves, women and men, can contribute to change the practices. A key aim of Horizon 2020 is to engage more experts with gender know-how in project teams, the advisory groups and proposal evaluation panels.
- So I very much encourage you all to register in the experts' database accessible via the European Commission Participant Portal to ensure that we can rely on high quality gender expertise for our proposal evaluations.

Importance of and encouragement for networking for the gender dimension in research

- I also would like to underline the importance of networking, and the key role that professional associations, platforms of scientists, patients and health NGOs and other networks can play in this context.
- As many of you may be aware of, the Commission is funding two important initiatives aimed at supporting networking: the COSTAction - GenderSTE, and an interactive portal, GENPORT, both run by gender experts.
- The first organises awareness-raising events across Europe; the second one offers to the scientific community a wealth of resources on gender in Research and Innovation, ranging from publications, experts' database to training resources, among others.
- In H2020 the programme reporting as well as the monitoring of the integration of the gender dimension will also be improved. The gender dimension will be part of the general reporting of project participants and the Commission will monitor it through a specific Performance Indicator on an annual basis as from 2016.
- However, Horizon 2020 is just a small part in the total budget spent for Research and Innovation in Europe. Member States provide the main research budget.
- The first European Research Area Progress Report published last September revealed great disparities among Member States - very little attention is given by Member States to the integration of the gender dimension in national research programmes.
- It is crucial that EU Member States make sure that their national Research and Innovation programmes also take account of the gender dimension and I hope that Horizon 2020 will inspire them.
- We are pleased to see that significant moves occurred recently in Ireland and in the Nordic Countries.
- A full consideration of the gender dimension in research content is now a requirement for the grant schemes of the Irish Research Council. Applicants are required to submit a written statement to the Council indicating that the gender dimension has been taken into account and explaining the implications for the research proposals.

- An enhanced gender policy was put in place by NordForsk, the network for Nordic research cooperation. All applications for grants must now describe the gender dimension in the proposed research and the gender composition of the consortium.
- Furthermore, in Italy some members of the national parliament proposed in 2013 a law which aims at including systematically gender issues in medicine.
- Finally I am convinced that gendered innovations stimulate creativity, offering new perspectives, posing new questions, opening new areas to research, offering more effective prevention and medical treatment to enhance the quality of life of both men and women.
- I wish the EUGenMed project a great success and I count on all of you to make it happen that the recommendations from EUGenMed will help to further improve the current situation in medical research and provide powerful input to European health and research policy and, last but not least, put Europe on the cutting edge of innovation to the benefit of our economy and society at large.

Thank you very much for your attention!