Barbershop Conference
Changing the discourse among men on gender equality

High-Level Event: THE BARBERSHOP

Speaking Notes
Chairperson of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission
Mr Sergiy Kyslytsya

Your excellencies,
Minister Sveinsson, Minister Belfort,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I’m proud to address the Conference and to say out loud that I am HeforShe.

Back in 2007 I was designated to represent my country Ukraine in the Council of Europe group of government experts who advise on the Organisation’s policies, standards and activities on women’s rights and gender equality. Not a very likely nomination for a career diplomat; but certainly one I am very proud of. First as a member, later on as Vice-Chair and now as Chair of the Gender Equality Commission, I can say, not without pride, that our work at the Council of Europe, brings us every day a bit closer to de facto gender equality.

I am proud to be a part of processes that have shaped gender equality developments in Europe and beyond, through milestone achievements such as the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention - the most comprehensive global legal treaty to protect women from violence. Its measures are firmly based on the premise that violence against women cannot be eradicated without investing in greater equality between women and men, and that in turn, only real equality between women and men, and a change in power dynamics and attitudes can truly prevent violence against women. I underline the word global as, although the Istanbul Convention was made in Europe, it is not meant for Europe only. Any country in the world can accede to it and use it as an inspiration in designing their national policies and standards.

For the Council of Europe, equality of women and men is a principle of human rights, and a sine qua non of democracy. Gender equality must not be seen as an issue exclusively for women. Otherwise, it excludes many from being aware of the problem. Still those who are aware may not see the urgency; and thus are prevented from taking responsible and intellectual decisions about how to solve such problems that concern our societies as violence against women. Even if the decisions are taken, the change won’t be real until it’s accepted in hearts and minds.
According to a UK national survey, by OnePoll, boys today are twice as likely to be close to their dads as in the past. It could lead, as one British psychologist put it, to future generations of emotionally intelligent fathers, willing to bring home so much more than just the ‘bacon’. It is also important in the context of a pervasive stereotype that a man has to be an alpha male on the career ladder. Here I fully agree with Ben Black, director of “My Family Care”, who, as quoted by the Independent, says that ‘You will never break the glass ceiling for women unless you get the men holding up their hands as dads in the workplace.’

Our work and standards at the Council of Europe are about making sure that women and men are equal partners; have the same rights and responsibilities; the same opportunities. And that their contribution to society – including political and economic life - is equally valued and respected. We believe both women and men should be active players and promoters of gender equality, or in the words of the HeforShe “one half of humanity in support of the other half of humanity, for the benefit of all”.

To achieve this, the Council of Europe promotes a genuine dialogue between women and men, on the sharing of responsibilities both in the private and the public sphere; challenging gender stereotypes and sexism whether it is in the media or education; tackling the attitudes and assumptions – mind-sets, gender-biased customs and traditions which contribute to treating women as subordinate members of the family or society; condoning and speaking up to challenge all forms of violence against women; encouraging men to lead by example and be role models – to lead the change together with women. Tragically, as seen in recent days, there is still a wrong pattern of manhood that is equated to violence. We all should agree and send a strong and clear message that there is nothing masculine or manly in killing women, cartoonists, journalists, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Roma.

In the book “Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide”, Nicholas D. Kristof writes: “In the nineteenth century, the central moral challenge was slavery. In the twentieth century, it was the battle against totalitarianism. We believe that in this century the paramount moral challenge will be the struggle for gender equality around the world.”

It is a paramount challenge indeed – we will need every single man to sign up to the HeforShe. I have. And, I am proud of it