

# INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

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**DEMOCRACY IS A WOMAN – BOLOGNA, 23 NOVEMBER 2018**

## The context

The international conference to be held on 23 November 2018 and promoted by the Legislative Assembly of the Emilia-Romagna region is intended to provide a contribution of thoughts and action on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

It is an opportunity of exchange to raise awareness of the social and cultural impact of violence, of what has been done to prevent and combat it, and to join forces and say it out loud "Enough!".

To the Emilia-Romagna region the event is also an opportunity to report the institutional, cultural and economic investment made in a broad set of structural policies to combat gender-based violence and promote women's empowerment, which translated into the regional framework law for equality and against gender discrimination approved on 27 June 2014 that implements the Istanbul Convention.

## The Conference

"Democracy is a woman" is a clear message that reminds of the key role women play in social integration, in the overcoming of crises and transitions that today undermine the quality and future of democracy in our communities. A common effort is increasingly urgent to agree on and share a set of values and principles that go beyond mere abstract claims of rights, to open the way to a system of corrective measures suitable for full parity democracy. In Italy, in Europe, all over the world. In view of the forthcoming European elections 2019 and within the framework of the campaign launched by the European Parliament encouraging people to vote #thistimeiamvoting, the message becomes a reminder and call for policy-makers at all levels to combat gender inequalities and to be directly committed to undertaking positive concrete actions in all fields, by placing the gender equality policies at the core of social evolution of the communities, collective accountability and universalism of human rights.

## MILESTONES OF THE LAW PASSED IN EMILIA-ROMAGNA

**2011 – REGIONAL COMMISSION FOR EQUALITY.** The *Regional Council Commission for the promotion of equal opportunities between women and men is established* (Regional law 15 July 2011, n. 8): it is the **first and only Commission** on equality/equal opportunities set up at regional level in Italy, to be **permanent, made of elected men and women** from different parties, and having **full powers** including the power to draft bills on the subject. In 2015 it was renamed **Regional Council Commission for Equality and Human Rights**, extending its scope of action and legislative powers.

Today the Commission is also responsible for monitoring and orienting the implementation of the framework law 6/2014, the relationships with regional, national and international institutions for the promotion of the fundamental rights of the European Union (Nice Charter).

**2012-2013 – LEGISLATIVE PROCESS TOWARDS THE FRAMEWORK LAW.** The Commission for Equality set up a process aimed at the drafting and submission of a law that strengthens women's rights and gender equality at any level falling under the region's responsibility. Firstly, the Commission held a number of meetings to analyse the existing policies and instruments for the promotion of equality and equal opportunities along with all regional governments and institutes and the main Women's Associations. The members of the Commission visited the 14 Anti-violence centres in Emilia-Romagna and the Treatment centre for abusive men (Local Health Authority in Modena). Eight thematic acts put forward by the Commission were approved unanimously by the Legislative Assembly. They consolidate the **"thematic areas"** upon which a regional framework regulation will be based, suitable for integrating gender equality into policies: **Representation and parity democracy; Education and gender culture; Women's representation in communication; Women's health and gender medicine; Preventing and combating gender-based violence; Women's employment and sharing of social and healthcare responsibilities.** As many exploratory meetings were held by the Commission, open to interested bodies, organisations and associations, thus providing hundreds of representatives of public and private bodies with the opportunity to bring their contribution. In the meantime, the Italian Government ratified the **Council of Europe Convention** on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) by law 27 June 2013 n. 77, thus raising awareness among institutions and policy-makers. Among all the initiatives that proved effective at institutional level, the Women of the Democratic Party of Emilia-Romagna launched a signature collection for a regional draft law based on a **popular petition** "for the setting up of the regional

network against gender-based violence and for the promotion of the culture of inviolability, respect and freedom of women". The draft law was submitted to the Legislative Assembly and combined with two other draft laws initiated based on a petition and submitted with the same text by a few municipalities.

**2014 – APPROVAL.** On 9 May **Roberta Mori**, member of Council and President of the Commission for Equality signed the submission to the Assembly of the "FRAMEWORK LAW FOR EQUALITY AND AGAINST GENDER DISCRIMINATION". Appointed **rapporteur of this measure**, President Mori presented it at all public exploratory meetings and to all assembly commissions that were called to express their opinions (Budget, Economic policies, Health and social policies, Culture Education and Training), until the **45 articles** were approved by the Commission for Equality. On 25 June the Legislative Assembly of Emilia-Romagna approved the text by a large majority, which then became the **regional law 27 June 2014, n.6**. A few weeks later, the regulation was implemented for the first time within the framework of the Regional law 23 July 2014, n. 21 "NORME PER L'ELEZIONE DELL'ASSEMBLEA LEGISLATIVA E DEL PRESIDENTE DELLA GIUNTA REGIONALE" (*Rules for the election of the Legislative Assembly and the President of the regional government*) that specifically implements art. 4 (Parity representation in the election system) with the introduction of the **double gender preference** and a gender-balanced list of candidates.

**2015-2016 THE LAW LEADS TO AN ALLIANCE IN THE REGION AND IN ITALY.** With the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> regional legislature, the framework law 6/2014 started to be implemented: the **regional government and legislative assembly** implemented the new instruments foreseen and a gender *mainstreaming* and cross-sectoral approach in policies as requested by the regulation. At the same time the law was presented at hundreds of conferences, institutional meetings and public initiatives at **regional, provincial, municipal, university** level and in the territories of Emilia-Romagna. A number of **associations** or Equal Opportunity Committees of **professional associations** working on women's health and empowerment, gender gap in education, gender employment gap and gender pay gap promoted various initiatives. The first **formal agreements** were signed for the implementation of the regional law 6/2014 in the **Municipalities and Unions of Municipalities** in Emilia-Romagna. The framework law 6/2014 became the benchmark at national level both for regional electoral regulations and for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women.

In July 2015 the national conference "Equality, the driving force for development" was held and the Emilia-Romagna region, on the basis of the law for equality and against gender discrimination, submitted the **national government and parliament a request** for the adoption of

an integrated and cross-cutting regulation for the prevention of gender-based violence. Given the position held by President Roberta Mori since 2013, as **National Coordinator of the regional Bodies for Equal Opportunities**, the contents of parity democracy and gender parity representation of the framework law were reintroduced by institutional initiatives and/or draft laws in Parliament and territories like the Autonomous Province of Trento, Autonomous Province of Bolzano and the regions of Abruzzo, Calabria, Basilicata, Campania, Lazio, Tuscany, Umbria, Veneto. In February 2016 the Presidents of the Commissions for Equality of the National Conference of Regional and Autonomous Provinces and the National Coordination of Regional and Autonomous Provinces Ombudsman Institutions signed the *Protocol to protect human rights, combat inequalities and promote equal opportunities*. This started concrete collaboration between the Commissions and **regional Ombudsmen** namely for the application of law 96/2014 on gender equality in municipal governments.

**2017-2018 A LARGER AND MORE CONCRETE ALLIANCE.** The **evaluation clause** of framework law 6/2014, applied and completed within the first months of 2018 (see publication dedicated to this issue), provides for many achievements and concrete impacts on regional policies, on the broader regional system that includes social-healthcare bodies, associations, entrepreneurial networks and institutions that in various ways contribute to the equality and antidiscrimination objectives of the regulation. Among the instruments at the disposal of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights, the meetings of the **Conference of Elected Women in Emilia-Romagna** disseminated exponentially the good practices and projects supported by the Region even through the allocation of financial resources. The Commission also involved all the **businesses in Emilia-Romagna** in a *Gender Equality* award within the framework of Corporate Responsibility. Relationships are increasing and the **regulation is increasingly known at international level** due to the dissemination of an English and Spanish version, thanks to an Agreement entered into by the regional Legislative Assembly and the Research and gender study team of EDGES (European PhD in Women's and Gender Studies) of the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures of the **University of Bologna (UNIBO)**. Sessions coordinated by UNIBO were conducted to improve knowledge of the law at the universities of **Granada, Oviedo, CEU-Budapest, Utrecht, Hull (UK), Lodz, Rutgers University (USA)**.

Worth mentioning are also the grants based on the framework law 6/2014 awarded by the Commission for Equality in the annual documents sent to the EU Commission by the Emilia-Romagna region within the European Session of the Legislative Assembly; and the visit of a delegation from the Assembly to Brussels, to submit the said regulation to the attention of European MEPs. Further relationships and

international projects on women's empowerment developed with foreign Associations through the **Council of Emilia-Romagna citizens living abroad** and the Association **Women of Mediterranean East and South European Network**, contribute to the ongoing dissemination process.