

WHIST Conference
November 7th 2011-10-27
*"Gendering Science and Technology -
Experimental Horizons of Structural Change"*

**Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I am very pleased to be here today and to have the honour of addressing you at this Conference and to hear about the results of the WHIST project and its guidelines.

I would first like to thank the Department for Equal Opportunities of the Presidency of Council of Ministers-Italy (DPO) for organising the event and inviting me. And I would particularly like to thank Mr Michele Palma, the project coordinator.

Let me especially pay tribute to the DPO's commitment throughout these years in coordinating and implementing activities aimed at improving the situation of women in science and technology research.

The European Commission appreciates its fruitful cooperation with the DPO and its other partners on these matters.

The WHIST project aims at changing attitudes with regard to gender diversity in research organisations and foster change. This is a topic of utmost importance for the Commission and which is in line with our current overall strategy focusing on the concept of 'structural change'. The definition of guidelines for the promotion of gender diversity in this context is thus very important.

It is a fact that women are underrepresented in the fields of science, technology and engineering. They represent only 13% of the Heads of Institutions in the Higher Education Sector and 9% of the Heads of Universities across Europe. This situation is simply not acceptable.

This has to do with stereotypes affecting choices of education, unconscious biases in the labour market and career progress. The problem is acute in the distribution of power and access to resources. Women get less.

This is a loss to society as a whole. And I can tell you: It is very bad economic policy. Not least in these times of global economic crisis, it seems obvious that we must realize the full potential of all human resources, equally well qualified.

I am convinced that women can benefit from science and science from women. There is no trade-off between promoting gender equality, and excellence. We must achieve a win-win situation for all researchers, their institutions and for Europe.

Commissioner Geoghegan Quinn made a commitment last year to propose structural changes, within universities and research institutions, across Europe, in order to promote equal representation of women and men.

In this light, we asked a group of external experts to provide us with elements to reinforce structural change activities in research institutions and universities.

We now have the report called 'Structural change in research institutions: Enhancing excellence, gender equality and efficiency in research and innovation'. We are very grateful to this group for this excellent work. The proposals are concrete, and they address all possible actors: the European Commission, Member States and Associated Countries, research performing organisation, funders, gatekeepers. This report is available online on the 'Science and Society' webpage of the Commission.

Another important field of intervention is increasing the awareness among the public at large. The Commission is currently preparing a major "Pan-European Public Information Campaign", to be launched in 2012. It aims at tackling stereotypes on gender in science and attracting more girls to STEM studies, and finally retaining more women in research careers at all levels.

We are also ensuring that the European Commission leads by example in promoting gender equality in research by respecting the 40% participation of the underrepresented

sex in all FP7 evaluation panels, expert groups and advisory groups.

Today's Conference marks the conclusion of the WHIST project. It is time to reflect on the challenges ahead of us in the framework of this new strategy. Our work on promoting gender equality in research is far from over!

In the forthcoming new Common Strategic Framework for Research & Innovation, Horizon 2020, we will dedicate a specific part to Gender in Research and Innovation activities. The focus will be on strengthening and systemizing the inclusion of gender analysis in the content of research and innovation and the implementation of *Structural Change* in cooperation and coordination with the European Union and the Member States.

We are aware that to achieve the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, the potential and the talent pool of women in science needs to be used more extensively and efficiently.

A difficult but fascinating task lies ahead of us.

For now, I wish you fruitful panel discussions. I have no doubt that the outcomes of the WHIST project will be very constructive!

Thank you very much.