

European seminar

Gender vulnerabilities and challenges through the crisis

NGOs action for maintaining the commitment to gender equality at EU and local level.

Mister Chairman,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

Representing the Foundation Maria Paola Colombo Svevo at this seminar is not only a great honor, but also an important challenge.

Around twenty years ago, Maria Paola Colombo Svevo was the first member of the European Parliament who put trafficking in human beings at the top of the European agenda :

the report she wrote is the milestone of the current EU approach based on Prevention, Prosecution and Protection.

Everything that she pointed out at that time, is still from an utmost actuality today.

The various instruments to combat THB (Daphne, STOP Program, the Joint Action...) also find their roots in her report.

Maria Paola inspired the work of many of us.

We will never forget her expertise in European policies,

combined with her deep sense of humanity and her inner as well as external elegance.

She was demanding for herself and indulgent for the others, except for those who abused her confidence.

In creating ARETUSA, the European Network Against Trafficking in Women,

she dedicated a large part of her energy to the building of bridges between NGO's and Governments,

between many European Member States,

between various ideologies

but before all, between people willing to work together with her.

I met Maria Paola for the first time in '95 while she was interviewing firstliners in prostitutes assistance.

I was impressed by her determination to combat human trafficking at a moment where only a few knew the existence of this contemporary form of slavery.

She worked hard to give protection and assistance to victims of THB when others saw them as illegal migrant workers.

She met a lot of them here in Brussels, showing them the same interest and the same respect she had for Ministers or Presidents.

I understood better the essence of her commitment when she invited me to a political meeting in Reggio Emilia.

Far from the European Institutions, Maria Paola was turning herself into a vibrant and fascinating political leader.

I'll never forget the light in her eyes and the power of her speech.

But without the constant support of her beloved husband, Maria Paola could probably not have been able to realize so many achievements.

She left us much too early and Giampiero Svevo still supports her actions, through the creation of the Foundation Maria Paola Colombo Svevo. The Foundation Maria Paola Colombo Svevo is a unique tool to continue the work once started by this “Grande Dame”.

As gender equality is still not achieved unfortunately,
it is important to maintain her vigilance for the years to come.

The Samilia Foundation, and its President Thierry Marchandise,
are proud to contribute to the realization of this first action of the
Foundation Maria Paola Colombo Svevo
that I’m very touched to represent here,

The SAMILIA Foundation was established by people of reference
willing to be engaged in the long-term actions to activate the fight against
trafficking in human beings
and to support efforts of associations working on that ground.

It is a public utility foundation established by a royal order five years ago.

Its name was inspired by the heroine of the book “The death of the King Tsongor” written by Laurent Gaudé.

Maria Paola Colombo Svevo had agreed to be one of the founder members of the Samilia Foundation.

Together with the Foundation Maria Paola Svevo and with ARETUSA, we are in a way carrying her moral legacy

She is still alive in our memories and actions.

I am sure that the debates of this afternoon will contribute to continue her achievements

as she would have wanted.