

University Women Europe holds conference and Annual General Meeting  
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The 2023 University Women Europe conference was held 5-7, October on the centenary of the creation of Republic of Turkey, hosted by the Turkish Association of University Women (TAUW) with a theme of “Peace, Equality, Solidarity & Women”.

The weekend started with delegates visiting Ege University in Izmir welcomed by Prof. Aylin Göztaş, Chair of the Communications and Public Relations Faculty. This was followed by a visit to the Mayor’s office and the iconic clock tower square in Izmir’s old city centre, a friendly evening catchup at a pier-side restaurant.

The conference started with a brief welcome from Dr. Başak Ovacık TAUW CER, Meral Guler, TAUW President, Esen Deger Alpagut, TAUW İzmir Branch President, and Dr. Anne Negre, UWE President.

The first lecture was on the women of the republic, presented by Dr Ovacık and Nazan Moroğlu, past president of TAUW, specialist in gender equality law, member of the parliamentary union advisory committee on gender equality, and past Vice President of the Istanbul Bar Association.

Both speakers took us through the history and milestone events in women’s rights, ranging from the 1926 civil code that provided equal rights and the progress of education in Turkey as it moved from religious to secular ethos. In 1985 Turkey ratified CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all Discrimination against Women), and 2011 the Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. A comprehensive overview on how this law progressed in society along the years leading to the Istanbul Convention was delivered, noting that in March 2021 Turkey withdrew from the Istanbul Convention, an action criticised around the world. Phrases to remember from the presenters, “For equal right peace is a must” and “We need solidarity and co-operation in the way to gender equality.”

The next session was about women in crisis, with a formidable panel including moderator Feride Acar, Professor Emeritus Political Science, CEDAW President, and contributor to the writing and implementing the Istanbul Convention.

Three speakers considered the topic from different directions: Zeynep Tuba Sungur post-doc researcher at SOAS, whose focus was on the worsening situation for Afghani women underscoring that there are more equality policies implemented in urban areas yet 70% of women are in rural areas where those policies have minor effects. She confirmed that the United Nations support should be conditional on negotiations with the Taliban to improve women’s rights.

Ozlem Altiparmak, Izmir lawyer, UN Women Consultant and Coordinator of the Climate Clinic at Ankara University, informed participants about the fundamental difference

between being reactive versus preparation in area with natural disasters, and how this affects recovery and women's welfare.

Prof. Zeynep Alemdar, Professor of International Law and Political Science and Director of Gender Studies at Istanbul Okan University, informed participants about security issues, women, and peace. She spoke of the Ukraine and Russian war, with rape and human trafficking being used as weapons of war. The audience agreed with her that women create peace and men stop war.

Following, UWE President, Negre presented an award to Feride Acar for her contributions in advancing women rights, followed by a very pleasant lunch and a chance to chat to local members and speakers.

That afternoon participants joined a workshop discussing Women in Leadership roles, conducted by Professor Huriye Toker from Yaşar University in Izmir Gender Centre. Her work and the discussion centred on gender equality planning, having quotas to deliver gender balance. There was rich discussion on the differences between various countries among the attendees, and regional parts of Turkey, in the challenges of how we get more inclusive and diverse leadership.

During the evening, participants enjoyed a traditional Turkish night with music and food in a restaurant situated in an old tower.

The UWE Annual General Meeting (AGM) included governance items with the election of a new Treasurer, Georgeta Stoican, lawyer from Romania, who gave a friendly words of acceptance and thanks with gratitude paid to Annelies Pierrot-Bults for her seven years dedication as UWE Treasurer. The president informed delegates that the Albanian Association has been re-admitted to UWE and National Federation and Association reports were given. Professor Aylin Göztaş, with degrees in communication and crisis management, gave a brief presentation on the future of NGOs highlighting the effect of global macro-forces like aging population, life stage evolution migration, ethnic and religious diversity. It was announced that next April's meet and greet will be hosted by the Marbella Association of Spain, and the conference and AGM in Albania.

"It was a very good conference with a high level of extremely knowledgeable speakers, the Turkish members were very friendly and engaging. We had an enjoyable evening meal with music at a local restaurant overlooking the sea front," said Aisha Alshawaf, Graduate Women International, Project Development Committee Convenor.