Prague, 19 May 2016

Ladies and gentlemen, dear guests, colleagues and friends,

The Public Defender of Rights joined Equinet in 2010, one year after the Defender became the Czech National Equality Body in the Czech Republic. Since then, we have never felt ready to co-organise such an important event. We looked up to the other national equality bodies with respect.

Over time, we have matured and gained confidence. Equinet inspired the process of our maturing and gave us valuable experience. For this we are very grateful. I am very happy that in 2016, similar Equinet seminars are organised also by our colleagues in Vienna and Budapest. In 2016, Central Europe is the place where experts from all over Europe come to discuss questions concerning equal treatment and discrimination.

Why the Czech Republic? Is it because we as the equality body have large experience in this field and would like to present it to our European colleagues? Is it because the Czech Republic was the best in the 2015 Gender Gap Index in equality in education? Is the Czech Republic the right place for such an event? The answers to these questions aren't accurate.

As regards education, we have spent the last years concentrating mainly on disabilities, religion and ethnicity, not gender. Over the six years of our activities, we have had only one complaint on the grounds of gender from the area of education.

When we look closer at the national statistics, we find that the Czech Republic's education system has a tendency for gender inequalities that are present in broader Czech society. It is true that in the 2015 Gender Gap Index, the Czech Republic ranked first in the area of gender equality in educational attainment; however, its overall ranking was 81.The first place only takes into account the number of women and men in the primary, secondary and tertiary education.

As regards the degrees of educational results, equal opportunities have been achieved, at least formally. But the result says nothing about the stratification of men and women in the specific fields and positions.

When we look closer at the national statistics, we find that the Czech Republic's education system has a tendency for gender inequalities that are present in broader Czech society. To give an example, the last few years showed the expansion of humanities and nursing study programmes. But, these fields mostly attract women, who then compete for less well-paid positions than men. This directly contributes to the gender pay gap, which is currently at 22% in the Czech Republic - the third worst result in Europe.

The 2015 Shadow Report on Gender Equality in the Czech Republic lists many problems in the area of gender equality in education. Let me mention some of them: gender equality is not seen as an important political value - the Educational Policy Strategy 2020 does not pay much attention to gender equality and it is not significantly included in the framework educational programmes nor in the criteria monitored by the Czech Schools Inspectorate.

Although the number of women in schools is several times higher than that of men, head teachers are almost exclusively men. The Czech Republic had been facing long term problems in attracting men to work as ordinary teachers.

So, why are we meeting here in the Czech Republic, why is this event organised by the Public Defender Rights and why is gender in education our topic today? The answer is simple: We are aware of our shortcomings in education and we would like to learn how we could improve that. We wish to remove from society structural inequalities, including inequality in education.

I believe that for many of you, the following days will be as inspiring as they will be for my colleagues from the Office of the Public Defender of Rights and I hope you will gain new insight that prove useful for your colleagues back at home.

Due to my responsibilities I cannot attend the whole seminar, So please let me comment on the current social and political situation.

Over the past months, Europe has been in a difficult situation that promotes intolerance, xenophobia and racism. Voices of intolerance are not heard only in the streets, but also in the top political offices as well.

At moments like these, I realise how important, but also how very fragile our institutions are. Not all equality bodies in Europe are independent, they do not have the same powers, and some cannot work effectively. This is why I will promote a greater role for the national equality bodies in my communication with the European Commission, specifically Commissioner Věra Jourova. I will also promote efforts aimed at including the standards formulated by Equinet over the past year in the European legislation. I realise that this will be a long-term effort, but one has to start someday.

Thank you for your attention and I wish you a fruitful and interesting seminar and courage to continue in your work.

Anna Šabatová, Public Defender of Rights, Czech Republic