Civil debate – 17 November 2021

Participants:

**Alexandra Adriaenssen** – Gender equality and women’s rights adviser to the Minister of Sports (Valérie Glatigny)

**Aurélie Aromatario** – University of Brussels, PhD in sociology about gender issues, feminism, and social movements

**Françoise Goffinet** – Federal Institute for Gender Equality

**Alban Herinckx** – Founder of the Belgian Bright Football League (BBFL – Amateur female football league)

**Lola Mansour** – Professional judoka and co-initiator of the “Balance ton sport” movement and association

**Michèle Remy** – Football player in the BBFL

Moderator:

**Christine Cloes** – Manager of Inforef

Discussion:

*The core elements of a successful policy against gender discriminations in sports AND*

*The ways which each participant can contribute against gender discriminations in sports?*

**M. Remy**: It starts at school, having less “gendered” sports in PE (dance for girls, football and basketball for boys), inform teachers and educators about equality, to decrease prejudices about sports and boys and girls. Give more visibility to female athletes and the aggressions they suffer (through the media, social media…), invest in sports to give more space to women.

**A. Adriaenssen** asks whether giving more visibility to aggressions would stop women from participating in sports.

**M. Remy**: Silence creates impunity and insecurity.

**Alban Herinckx**: Positive campaigns can encourage women to participate in sports. The aim of BBFL was to make football accessible and cool for girls. BBFL uses short videos, interviews with players to make football appealing. Public-funded campaigns to involve girls in sports could change mentalities and foster participation.

**A. Adriaenssen**: Current “Plus sportives” campaign has just been started and until 2024. It addresses: women’s practice of sports, fight against sexist violence and discrimination, women’s participation in decision-making.

Federations will have to increase female representation in boards of directors.

**L. Mansour**: It should start in education, training. She does not understand why physical education is still not mix-gendered.

**A. Adriaenssen**: It is not a legal obligation, it is a school choice.

**A. Aromatario**: Separating girls and boys in PE has its benefits too; teenage girls can feel self-consciousness, fear to be observed when they practice sports, and be more at ease with other girls.

**A. Adriaenssen** points out that when they are separate, different sports are proposed.

**A. Aromatario**: The new sport Plan does not include education, but teacher training will include gender issues.

We need to vary practices. We observe that girl do less sports, and different sports, and those sports are usually private, not in public spaces. Most public infrastructures are dedicated to sports mainly practiced by men, especially football.

**Alban Herinckx** points out that despite its flaws, football is extremely popular and a great medium for social interactions and can be used for social actions. BBFL regularly refuse teams due to lack of infrastructure.

**A. Aromatario**: Women can also be reluctant to practise sports in public because their body is sexualised. Lack of socialisation in how sports is organised for girls. Sports, among amateur women, is often used to lose weight rather than for pleasure.

Are there procedures in case of denouncing a harasser? In companies, one person has to be appointed to talk to.

Male athletics is still the norm to be compared to, while sports where women perform better receive less media attention.

**F. Goffinet**: Multiple and varied complains have been received: boys not allowed to practice dance, referees paid less when they referee a women’s match, insurance company not covering mixed-gender practice. Only 3% of our cases go to justice. We also use mediation, awareness, training… positive communication to improve things.

Need for training for female coaches and federation management. It was discovered that training schedule were problematic (childcare), so they had to be adapted to attract more women.

About the media: social media tend to reach like-minded people. Local media have a role to play to reach more people and make them discover female sports.

*Proposals/ ideas for the operation of an effective European network against gender discrimination in sports?*

**A. Adriaenssen** mentions the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sports and the All In project