

I am truly touched by Mr Eugenio Gay's speech (pause)

And extremely pleased to be able, as the first woman vice-president, to talk to you today.

My esteemed, distinguished guests, colleagues and friends, I want to talk about the magnificent moments in FBE history made by women presidents.

This is a modern history, first chronicled only 7 years ago when in 2015 Professor Sara Chandler was elected in Bilbao - The first woman to join the FBE Presidency.

In 2017, when she became President, she was immediately asked to find ways of supporting an independent judiciary in Poland. She wrote 54 letters in the first three weeks. All about the need to halt any interference with the independence of the judiciary.

I remember reading on Facebook, someone described Sara as “unstoppable”!

And this, in fact, is what I think about Sara too – unstoppable!

As the FBE president - she was unstoppable in assisting the campaign and making a difference when it came to lawyers in need. No matter whether in Columbia, Turkey or Poland.

During her Presidency, Sara also initiated a campaign for women leaders in the law,

This included FBE members taking part in the international survey, and roundtables for women lawyers.

I am also so lucky to count Sara as my friend. Not only do we share similar values, and tastes for places, food and people, but we even have the same Birthday! Some of you may remember us celebrating it together during the FBE Congress (and it wasn't Autumn).

The same year Sara was elected FBE President, Silvia Giménez-Salinas Colomer became the 2nd FBE Vice-president and thus the 2nd women-president in the history of the organization.

She was subsequently elected the FBE president in 2019 and because of the pandemic she holds the record for the longest term an FBE president has been in office.

Silvia organized two Congresses in Barcelona and Lisbon.

In fact, 2019 was the first time that the FBE and CCBE joint Congress took place in Lisbon

It was also the first time both organisations met to share their experiences and presentations about the need for training and excellence in the legal profession.

Unfortunately, after only a few months of normality, an enforced confinement brought about by the pandemic hit in March 2020.

These were a difficult few months for the FBE Presidency and Silvia as president had to keep the Federation's spirits up, but online only.

Silvia's term in office indisputably experienced very trying times during the pandemic's relentless grip.

Courageously, she led the Federation through these testing times with the aid of first vice-president Dominique Attias, who was elected FBE President in 2021 during an online General Assembly. (Another first in FBE's history).

The same year, I was elected second vice-president and had the great pleasure and honour of working with Dominique. I learnt about true leadership from her. Most of all I admired her courage in making clear, uncompromised statements every time she had to speak up for vulnerable lawyers.

She would travel to support them in Afghanistan or Turkey, devoting her time and efforts, no matter how uncomfortable, to make sure FBE's voice could be heard all over the world.

The second half of Dominique's term was totally dominated by the war in Ukraine. By the fourth day of the war, the FBE was the first international organization to set up an online meeting with the vice president of the Ukraine National Bar Association (UNBA),

Dominique immediately wrote letters to all Bar members asking for support for Ukrainian citizens and lawyers. Almost every FBE Bar member responded providing invaluable assistance in different forms to Ukrainian citizens and colleagues.

After that difficult period of COVID isolation, we were all relieved and delighted to be able to meet face-to-face once again at the superbly well-organized Congress in Paris. Then we met at the joint CCBE and FBE Congress in Sofia attended by a large number of FBE Bar representatives.

Please let me reiterate once again!

I was so lucky to have worked with these three FBE women presidents: Sara, Silvia and Dominique. I observed how the FBE benefitted from such diversity within the presidency. How women could use their creativity, compassion and sensitivity to effect, shape and inspire the Federation Leadership.

I firmly believe that it is not only vital but imperative to build on this legacy and to continue maintaining and enhancing a diverse leadership.

As a lawyer, of course, I am always careful about generalizing.

Having said that, it needs to be said that, when it comes to leadership, women offer a uniqueness and a differing layer of diversity,

I do not mean a difference reflected in stereotypes formed by varied social expectations of gender, steeped in bias or traits like, for example, and I should say it is on a humorous note,

I idly commented once in a conversation with our Secretary General Patrick Dillen, "that men can't usually admit to making a mistake".

To which he replied " I don't think it is true, but I am not sure I can comment because I have never made any mistake.

So what do I mean by "difference"?

I mean that in each of us, men and women. There is a unique potential that men and women can bring to the conversation or discussions at any level of our social life, including politics, work, and education.

Great things come out of it! As of now, where our presidency team is steered by a fantastic leader - Our president Bas Martens, is always very supportive, encouraging, decisive and appreciative of others.

With Monique, Patrick, Mark, Domonique, Marta and Philippe, we are a supremely diversified team adding different colours, textures and levels. And, of course, different experiences and knowledge, from which the FBE very much benefits.

So to finish off, I want to tell you about when I was in my 30s (as the Federation is now) I was studying my second subject. I remember one of my University professors remarking in a private conversation, that people in their thirties like me then are in their prime.

We can say The FBE is in its prime now!

However, I must admit that it has crossed my mind at several stages of my life that I was actually in my prime - I still do think this.

What I am trying to say is that I am totally convinced that the best is still to come for the FBE.

I hope and wish for the FBE and for all of us, that in ten years time when the FBE will be celebrating its 40th anniversary - Another woman vice-president or president, would be able to recount how many more past women -presidents will have made up the future history of the FBE.

And finally, if any woman here today with the support of her Bar would like to stand for any position within the presidency at any point in future -

I solemnly promise, that I will help and support you to achieve your goal to contribute to the further development of the FBE - as did Sara, Silvia, Dominique and myself - To make more Magnificat moments in FBE history.