

# WIL Europe Dinner Debate with the French Minister Laurence Rossignol

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On November 8<sup>th</sup>, WIL Europe was thrilled to be hosted by the French Ministry for Families, Children, and Women's Rights, for a powerful yet intimate dinner with the French Minister Laurence Rossignol in Paris. The dinner gathered 16 top-notch women business executives, members of the European Institutions, representatives of non-governmental organizations and academics, to discuss the theme: **"How to promote women in leadership roles in Europe / Accélérer l'accès des femmes aux postes de responsabilité en Europe."** The participants shared with the French Minister Laurence Rossignol insights, best practices, and fostered a common reflection on women's empowerment at the European level.

The discussion was structured into 3 sub-themes: *Promouvoir les femmes dans des postes de direction / Promoting women in leadership positions; La gestion des talents féminins / Managing women's talents; Les politiques européennes en matière de promotion des femmes, à l'échelle nationale et européenne / European policies to promote women in Europe, and the European countries.*

Opening the discussion on the first theme, « *Promoting women in leadership positions* » **Brigitte Dumont**, VP Group Corporate Responsibility (CSR) at Orange, stressed out the importance of the CEO's commitment and of both women and men managers to break the glass ceiling that prevent women from accessing top level positions. An opinion shared by **Kristin Schreiber**, Director of the COSME Program and SME Policies at the European Commission, who thinks that a collective effort towards gender equality is required from both the public and private sectors. In this line, **Maria Pernas** Senior Vice-President, and Group Deputy General Counsel ATOS, announced her company's objective to recruit up to 50% of women in leadership positions in the following years. This commitment is supported by a recent study lead by ATOS, proving that diversity enhances performance and well-being in companies. This point was reinforced later by **Claudine Schmuck**, President of Global Contact, who spoke about "Diversity marketing" to explain that promoting diversity is a marketing asset for companies, as it gives an image of modernity and performance. Nevertheless, **Nathalie Wright**, General Manager Enterprise & Partner Group at Microsoft, pointed out the issue of diversity management: to be effective, diversity management should be inclusive, and address all specific needs of women. Providing some examples, **Paulina Dejmek-Hack**, Member of Cabinet, and Economic Advisor to President Juncker, European Commission, spoke about informal practices which are detrimental to women's family responsibilities, i.e. setting decision making meetings after 7pm, or late nights of work which however tend to be prolific by providing networking opportunities.

The second theme “*Managing women’s talents*” was introduced by **Béatrice Delmas-Linel**, Managing Partner of the French office of Osborne Clarke who is taking very seriously her managing role by helping inside her firm women talents develop their skills and find their leadership styles. Under her management, Osborne Clarke France has become one of the most performant law firm of the Group. **Katherin Corich**, who started her own company Sysdoc at the age of 25, has built her success on a simple yet disrupting management style: Trusting women to be equally qualified as men, hiring them, and strongly supporting them: “*We are a team, everyone is watching each other’s backs.*” An assertion strongly supported by **Isabella Lenarduzzi**, President of JUMP, who claimed “*Mutual support is essential. There is no market share in feminism!*”

Addressing the issue of recruiting women’s talents in the STI sector, **Bénédicte Javelot**, Chief Strategic Officer at Orange, regretted that science and technology are still unattractive to young women. The percentage of women studying science remains very low (around 25%) and women lack of role models in scientific and technological sectors. **Christine Petit**, Human Resources Director at Orange, shared her analysis by focusing on Orange’s programs dedicated to Talents’ development, which include mentoring programs. **Marina Niforos**, founder and president of Logos Global Advisors asserted that Digital has been disrupting business models for a few years now, and is becoming the major challenge of the coming decades. It is crucial for young girls not to turn their backs on the digital and learn how to code early.

Moving on the third theme, “*European policies to promote women in Europe*”, **Pinuccia Contino**, Head of Unit at the DG Justice and Consumers at the European Commission provided her insights on the European Commission’s initiatives for gender equality. In her opinion, women cannot fully contribute to the economy and the society if they continue to face gender disparities at home. To fight discriminations in every aspect of women’s life, the European Commission is launching a campaign on November 25<sup>th</sup> to fight against gender based violence. **Anne Houtman**, as principle advisor to the European Commission, reminded the motto of the European Union: “*United in Diversity*”. Diversity, in the broad sense, is a European value which should always search to achieve equality while respecting differences.

After hearing from the participants’ interventions, **Laurence Rossignol, French Minister for Families, Children, and Women’s Rights**, concluded the discussion with several remarks about the situation of women in France and Europe. She would like to understand why, regardless the numerous campaigns launched on the subject, the percentage of women in science still remains so low? She denounced the political timidity to name rape culture and to recognize its influence in gender based discriminations: “*la pudeur à nommer les inégalités hommes / femmes est une timidité à agir*” (“*Modesty to name gender inequalities is a timidity to act up on*”). Therefore, the Ministry has initiated a series of initiatives to fight systemic discriminations. Among those, she launched a 6 months’ campaign on social media with the hashtag #SexismePasNotreGenre, to fight daily sexism.