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Introductory remarks on Session 2

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the second session of our conference on gender, money and finance.

Recently, Isabel Schnabel, Member of the ECB's Executive Board, said in an interview that it makes such a big difference to the tone of and the decision making in meetings if another woman is present. All of you will also remember the photo that was posted by Christine Lagarde, when she invited her ECB council colleagues to an informal exchange of views over dinner for the first time. As one observer rightly noted, there were more paintings of women hanging on the wall of the conference room than women sitting around the conference table.

The reality is that since the start of the euro, the ECB's Governing Council has been dominated by men by a vast majority. This phenomenon is not only true for the Eurosystem in particular; it also holds for the central bank community in general, where decision-making bodies continue to be male dominated.

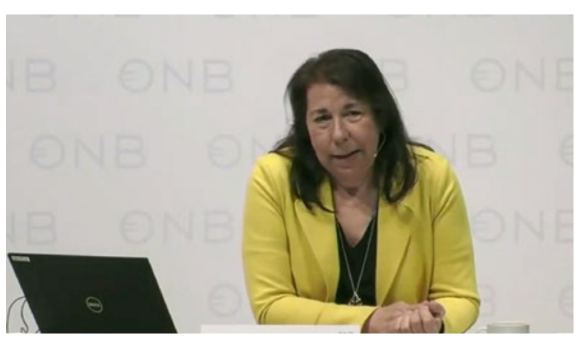
In fact, the feeling described by Isabel Schnabel also became familiar to me, when I had the possibility to participate in several committees, regardless of which institution or in which setting: be it the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Investment Bank (EIB), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) or the high-level Monetary Policy Committee of the Eurosystem; be it an exchange of views with professors from universities or researchers from local research institutes. Nine out of ten times, you end up in a male-dominated environment. All the more so, if you are working on a topic closely related to money and finance.

At the beginning of my career, I thought that things would change and that the women I had met during my (postgraduate) studies at university would join one or the other committee after a while. But they would not.

The idea for this conference was born two years ago, when Ernest Gnan, Head of the Economic Analysis Division of the Oesterreichische Nationalbank (OeNB), and I were sitting – once again – in a meeting held by a committee consisting primarily of men. We then got to work, and here we are today: we are extremely proud that so many successful women from the "money and finance community" have joined us for this event.

Each of the following three sessions will be chaired by a female director of the OeNB: Karin Turner-Hrdlicka, Director of the Department for the Supervision of Significant Institutions, Petia Niederländer, Director of the Payments, Risk Monitoring and Financial Literacy Department, and myself, Director of the Economic Analysis and Research Department. Three women at the directors' level is definitely a success story; however, this success story is relativized by the fact that the OeNB currently has an all-male Governing Board. And while 40% of OeNB staff are female, only a mere 26% of managers are women.

Yet, we have demonstrated last year that deliberate action can bring forward a change: an incentive scheme to promote women on expert career tracks helped raise the share of women in expert careers from 35% in 2020 to 38% one year later. Going beyond this specific example, gender-related activities at the OeNB



have a long-standing tradition and have been further strengthened by the fact that since 2015, the Austrian Federal Equal Treatment Act also applies to the OeNB. Therefore, we have a legally binding "action plan for the advancement of women" in place.

But let me come back to the beginning of my introductory remarks, as this session will explicitly deal with the topic of "Central bank decisions by committee: does gender matter?". Considerable caution is warranted when investigating the question of whether stronger female participation in monetary policy decision-making committees changes the focus and pattern of decisions or deliberations.

On the one hand, the current underrepresentation of women makes it difficult to precisely estimate the effects of female presence. On the other hand, the existing literature on the effects of gender on monetary policy decision making is inconclusive. Thus, seemingly opposing results regarding female voting behavior in monetary policy committees need to be taken with a grain of salt for several reasons.

First, the findings are hardly suitable for a rigorous comparison, given that they may be driven by sampling effects. Moreover, the periods and geographical areas under review vary substantially across studies, as does the level of analysis (country-level cross sections versus member-level panels). Second, existing contributions all suffer from identification challenges, albeit to varying degrees. While the studies uncover robust correlations in the data, the estimated coefficients may not reflect the causal effect of gender on voting behavior in committees. Last but not least, the diversity of teams may also have an impact, as voting behavior may, inter alia, be influenced by the interactions between committee members.

I am convinced that my guests will provide some clarification on these open questions, as they either work in academia or hold top positions in central banking. Let me warmly welcome Paola Profeta, Professor at Bocconi University, Rannveig Sigurðardóttir, Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Iceland, Sylvie Goulard, Second Deputy Governor of the Banque de France, and Ana Ivković, Vice Governor of the National Bank of Serbia.

Finally, before giving the floor to our panelists, let me quote from the International Women's Day website: we have only reached our goal if we no longer need to commemorate Women's Day. With reference to this, I would like to conclude by saying: we have only reached our goal if we no longer need a separate conference on gender, money and finance.

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