Mrs POPTODOROVA (Bulgaria).—Mr President, distinguished colleagues, feminism will be referred to as one of the great revolutions of the 20th century. I know that the term itself still provokes condescending smiles, which is probably the result of the hyperearnestness of some of its exponents. I am prepared to discard the term, provided that we look into its substance. I think that that has been the ambition of the Rapporteur, Mrs Err. The report aims at looking into the practicalities of the still-controversial problem of the right to equality between women and men.

The report and the work done by the Council of Europe in that respect fall within the context of a 20-year effort which became a main item on the agenda of the United Nations Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the United Nations World Social Summit in Copenhagen, which will be the focus of the entire world in Beijing in September. The report is fully in line with the recommendations of those fora in promoting women's rights as human rights and the concept of parity democracy.

Equality between women and men is a global issue, but global issues demand specific solutions. It is here that the work of the Council of Europe is essential, as it is targeted at the European dimension of the problem. Unlike the situation in the Middle East or Asia, the strict equality of rights between men and women is no longer publicly opposed by European legislators. I share, however, the view expressed in paragraph 4 of the draft recommendation, on the deficiencies of national law-making. The lack of concrete legislation is often, if not always, due to existing behavioural patterns and customs which stand in the way of the de facto equality between men and women and which are the most difficult to change.

I have already mentioned equality three times. Does equality exist? Is it attainable? I do not want to think of it as a utopia. However, human beings have always strived for it, but have not attained it so far. Therefore, while recognising the usage of the term, I would conceptually stick rather to partnership between women and men and more fairness, if you wish.

In line with what I have said, I would like to emphasise especially the importance of paragraphs 2, 5 and 6 of the draft recommendation. Yes, there is a generally recognised tendency in respect of the feminisation of poverty. I can testify to that fact in the case of my country, Bulgaria. With the sharply limited job opportunities in transition, women are the first to lose their jobs.

In the chaotic market environment which does not yet abide by reliable and fair rules, women are often discriminated against, even on the grounds of motherhood. Through economic imperatives, motherhood is now practically discouraged. Birth rates have gone down to a minus rate in my country which is the first symptom of a country becoming depopulated.

I had intended to table two amendments to the draft recommendation, but regrettably I missed the deadline. One of the amendments was going to be on special legislative and government guarantees against the professional and moral discrimination of women on the grounds of motherhood. Sigmund Freud, who is popularly associated with his phallocratic approaches and interpretations, is known to have exclaimed towards the end of his life: "Give me the best mothers and I will make a better world for you." Legislators cannot do less.
Secondly, I want to emphasise the significance of setting up national institutional bodies referred to in paragraph 6 (vi). My failed intention was to add to that paragraph the setting up of all-party parliamentary groups dealing with women’s issues, similar to the group in the British parliament. Regrettably, most parliaments and governments, including the Bulgarian ones, seem to underrate the importance of the issue. Such bodies are absolutely required for promoting and monitoring national efforts and results in the empowerment of women in their parity participation in public life.

Finally, I want to quote someone who is famous to generations of people. Zsa Zsa Gabor, the famous star, is reported to have said, "Being macho does not prove mucho". That is not an aphorism meant specially to underrate the value of men. It simply suggests that both men and women should be valued equally for what they stand for as human beings and that partnership between them will help them contribute to a more stable and harmonious society.