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**Book presentation “Women leading the way in Brussels”**

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I am very sorry that I cannot be with you at this joyful and important event. Claudia and Corinna put a lot of work into giving us this book. And I would like to thank you for what you have done. I would also thank Ana for being a double host. There are countless of us who lead in economy, science, culture and entrepreneurship, who lead in the field of social action, who are active in changing perception of women in their professions.

There are also many of us who are mentoring next generations of female leaders, helping young women to find support within existing networks and to create the new ones, that reflect their own experiences. Paradoxically, the one sphere of human action which is lagging in response to womens' aspirations to leadership is politics, both on the national and the European level.

Women's leadership, either here in Brussels, or in national capitals is still more an aspiration than a reality. There is a great talent pool of women in the European institutions, but, as we all know it from our experience and discussions with other women, it is often underused, or even marginalized on purpose.

Sometimes our male leaders bring with them some entrenched prejudices about the role of women from their home countries. And that often impact negatively the progress and advancement of women in the institutions.

The time has come to regain our power in Europe's name. We need to create a critical mass for the transition from talk to real action for equality of women and men. We need more attention to build efficient structures of empowerment and support for women in the mid-level career positions, for this is the moment when the right kind of support can propel them to real leadership. We need more networks, more commitment for mentoring on the part of women who are at the top-level in their professional or political life.

Politics is an unforgiving, and often brutal place to be, especially for women. Helping other women go forward, in this often uninviting environment, is our responsibility, not an option. I like this well-known quote from Madeleine Albright: "There is a special place in hell for women who don't help other women." She spoke from her deep experience, also from the experience of being discriminated against. We should keep her words in our hearts.

European Parliament is a modern agora, a good place to present, legislate and build support for real action that would make politics more hospitable to women. This is why we have to support each other, also here in Brussels.

You all remember the action #Metoo. It accomplished many great things, showed the anger of women, but also a determination for a better world. Now, perhaps we should constitute a movement called #UStoo, with the same determination, but more long-term goals. I would be proud to be part of such a movement.

Today you celebrate a joyful occasion, thus you may be a little surprised to see me dressed in black. This is my conscious choice. I am recording this message on Friday, twenty-third of March, when in Poland women organize the Black Protest against the inhumane legislation concerning abortion that is being proposed by the Polish Parliament. I stand in solidarity with my Polish friends, for equal rights for women, for freedom and democracy in my country.

I wish you all the best, with the hope that this book will contribute also to such a state, when Black Protests will not be needed anymore, anywhere.