



Annual Congress of FBE 2018: New Families – New Challenges



• Carolina Marin Pedreno

The Annual Congress of the Federation of Bar Associations in Europe (“FBE”) took place in the beautiful and cultural city of Bologna. The City of Westminster and Holborn Law Society, a member of the FBE, was represented by the President, Coral Hill and Sara Chandler QC (Hon) FBE President.

The main subject of the congress was ‘New families - New Challenges,’ an interesting and provoking theme for discussion in the medieval Cloister of San Domenico, where the educational programme took place.

We were warmly welcomed by Giovanni Berti Arnoaldi, President of the Bar Association in Bologna. The President of the FBE Sara Chandler QC (Hon), in beautiful Italian (a gesture which was really appreciated by the hosts), highlighted the importance of working together and the need for cooperation on legal issues within Europe in these troubling and changing times. By way of example she mentioned the number of lawyers serving prison sentences in Turkey in breach of our professional rights. The FBE enjoyed the presence of the President of the Bar Association of Tunisia, Abdelaziz Essie, whose speech was interrupted by the applause several times. It was refreshing to hear how a group of lawyers helped his country to ensure hotels there could continue to host international conferences, fighting and supporting them against terrorism; the enormous power of lawyers’ collective actions evidenced in reality.

The intellectual quality of the presentations was overwhelming. I felt really privileged to participate, speaking about the 21st Century Family in England and Wales, in front of delegates from all over Europe. In England and Wales, for example, same sex couples have been able to adopt children since 2004, where marriage is available to them and where they can have children through surrogacy arrangements, it transpires that just a couple of hours away by plane from London, in Bulgaria, the lawyer from Bulgaria had received threats for simply representing LGBT clients and advising them on their identity. She was looking for support for Bulgaria to develop and fight for Human Rights and she found that support at this Congress where she was put in touch with other organisations fighting LGBT rights all over the world like the International Academy of Family Lawyers.

Other panels presented on ADR and the criminal aspects of family law. The Barcelona Bar Association, represented by the current President, Ma Eugenia Gay, seems to be working actively on the implementation of ADR. Silvia Giménez-Salinas, former President of the Bar Association of Barcelona and current President of the ADR Commission of FBE made us all think about the danger of allowing the judiciary to exercise the role of a negotiator or a mediator.

The social and psychological aspects of the most recent changes on family issues were also discussed. Children from same sex couples are discriminated against and the biological link continues to be put above any other family links; that is how the Courts and legislation continue to perceive it. It was, overall, a really stimulating, educational day with a well-deserved break for lunch. Bologna and good food are synonymous. The lasagne and risotto which we had was to die for! I served myself seconds while chatting to an Argentinean lawyer about their recent civil code and new maintenance regulations.

The local lawyers took me for a quick drink in the Piazza before heading for the gala dinner at the Circolo della Caccia. They told me they are facing really significant delays in family proceedings and the lack of international training meant that their Courts do not differentiate between domestic and international cases.

Dinner was splendid, a perfect ending to an amazing day. I offer my sincerest congratulations to the organisers, Avvocati Federico Canova, Stefania Tonini y F.Christian Di Nardo. The food and drinks were delicious and provided yet another opportunity to meet interesting colleagues from other jurisdictions.

The General Assembly took place on Saturday morning. Sarah Chandler QC (Hon) received deserved and genuine gratitude for the achievements within her Presidency.

I want to thank CWHLs for the work they do on international affairs. I was not aware of the existence of the FBE previously, but it has been an opportunity to participate and most importantly to meet some incredibly interesting and inspiring colleagues, who share the same problems and concerns, in such a wonderful environment.

CWHLs is organising a conference with a group of Italian lawyers and judges from Milan in October 2018. I will not miss it.

Carolina Marin Pedreno Dawson Cornwell



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