

COUNCIL OF EUROPE: MENDES BOTA HONOURED WITH MEDAL OF MERIT



Mendes Bota received, in Strasbourg, from the hands of the president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Anne Brasseur, this body's Medal of Merit, along with being granted the statute of Honorary Member, for his work and commitment to the European cause and upholding the principles of Human Dignity, Democracy and the Rule of Law.

The former Portuguese MP, who forewent his mandate on 30 November 2014 last, to join the Cabinet of European Commissioner Carlos Moedas, after 24 years as member of Assembly of the Republic and the European Parliament, enjoyed a long and intense activity at the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, he first integrated on 25 January 1988.

In the last nine years his role in this prestigious international organization reached a unanimously renowned success, having exercised several roles, such as president of the Committee on Equality of Opportunities between Women and Men, vice-president of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, vice-president of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development, as well as vice-president of the Subcommittee on the Trafficking of Human Beings.

Mendes Bota was appointed rapporteur on numerous occasions, having presented and upheld reports on various different subjects. Worthy of special praise were his works on "Tourism and Sustainable Development", "Lobbying in a Democratic Society" or, more recently, "Prostitution, Trafficking and Modern Slavery in Europe."

It was in the field of combatting violence against women that his actions left a long lasting mark. In her speech, Anne Brasseur referred to Mendes Bota as a "*true Ambassador of the Council of Europe and the Istanbul Convention*", to highlight the decisive role the former MP had on all stages of the process that led to the writing, approval and entry into force of the "Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence."

After having participated actively in the European campaign “Stop Violence against Women”, between 2006 and 2008, as Coordinator for the Assembly of the Republic Workgroup, which developed an intense action across the Country, Mendes Bota authored Resolution 1635 and Recommendation 1847, both unanimously approved in Strasbourg, on 3 October 2008, during the debate over his report on “Combatting Violence against Women: towards a Council of Europe convention”, in which he urged the Ministers Committee of the Council of Europe to advance with the creation of the aforementioned Convention, what became a reality.

Afterwards, Mendes Bota took part in the works of the “ad-hoc” committee (CAHVIO), which for two years drafted the Convention’s text, having contributed for the adoption of some of its articles, and authored the final ruling report on the Convention, approved by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

The recognition for his role in materializing this judicial and binding international instrument reflected itself on the fact that he was the only parliamentarian (besides the president of PACE) invited to attend the inter-government opening ceremony of the Convention’s signing, which took place in Istanbul, on 11 May 2011.

From here on, Mendes Bota was appointed Coordinator of the European Parliamentary Network “Women Free From Violence”, composed of representatives from the parliaments of the 47 Council of Europe’s member States, and affiliated States, whose mission lied in promoting the contents and purposes of the Convention, as well as raising awareness before Governments and Parliaments towards the subscription and ratification of this instrument.

This last objective was accomplished on 1 August 2014, when the minimum number of 10 States ratified the Istanbul Convention was accomplished, determining its entry into force, in what came to be an historical date on behalf of the rights of all the victims of gender violence and domestic violence.

Up to now, 37 member States have already signed the Convention, of which 16 concluded the respective ratification.

Mendes Bota was, over these years, a conference guest speaker in many dozens of nations in Europe, America, Asia and Africa, having spoken on several occasions at UN events, becoming thus a respected and cherished voice by militants from both camps of women’s rights and the fight against gender violence in general.

Although this mission, unfortunately, is far from over, Mendes Bota considered his commitment to the cause, as well as contribution to the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, as the fullest and most successful political work he was ever involved in his parliamentary career.

Hence, by embracing the new challenge proposed to him, he did so with a sense of having fulfilled his duty. Being granted the Medal of Merit of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, and the statute of Honorary Member of this institution, is in the end the enjoyable apex of this trajectory, and a proof of international recognition.