Ladies and Gentleman,
dear attendees of the women's forum

I was asked to say a few words of my career, about today's European cinema, and also to talk about the role of women in the European culture and the current movie landscape. These topics represent a wide scope, therefore I will streamline a bit my following remarks and will tell you my own story. After all, I am a woman and I know of what I talk about.

the very first character, which I played was Sibel in the movie "Head-On" and it was a lucky stroke for me. A colleague at that time said to me: Sibel, such a character you get the chance to play every ten year and that is, if you are very lucky. It was years later that I understood and realized how right she was.

To play a leading character, who is strong and vulnerable at the same time, is offered very rarely to a woman. I was lucky enough that it did not take another ten years for me to play the next major female character. But – more time probably passed by, than it would have if I were a man. That role was Umay the leading role in "When we Leave", for which we won the LUX Film Prize for the Best European Film in 2010.
A couple of years later, I was again fortunate enough to play an admittedly small but strong character in Games of Thrones.
Looking at it today: I was indeed very lucky within my career up to now – however, my colleague which I quoted earlier was right with what she said. If I were an actor and not an actress, who had won within four years two times the most important German Film Award for the leading role in a movie, it is unlikely that four years would have passed, to be offered another major character in a movie.

Of course, I have played other roles in between. I had the chance to play a few small, but subtle characters, others not quite like that and even more others, in which my character was degenerated to side-dish for the dominating male character.

As long as you are young and have a kind-of OK look, an actress is usually offered characters primarily to support the major male character. Too bad though, that we grow older … because then comes the time, when we as women are offered less interesting characters.
"Older" is in this case subject to interpretation. In the movie business this might easily mean that as a woman you are just about to retire once you turn mid or end of your thirties.
But, and let me point that out again, I do not want to complain, until now I was fortunate. But I surely can say that this business is hypocritical and that is true specifically if you are a women. Women should not be too old, nor too intelligent nor even too beautiful – almost everything can be interpreted to our disadvantage.
It is worthwhile though to have a look into other countries and you find that not everywhere these difference are so striking. France for example loves, honors and celebrates their actresses, their women, no matter of which age.
In Germany, where naturally most of my experience resides, we as actresses ourselves seem to appreciate being seen with a low-profile and that it is natural for us to have more challenges than our fellow male actors. This is quite strange though, as Germany takes pride in itself as being a country with a high degree of women liberation. When it comes to "strong female characters" in movies though, we are a developing country, considering the

fact that most of the female characters are only there to make the male lead character be polished and shiny.

With some of the movie directors we as women have to fight about recognition and respect to be recognized at all. At least, if one is not playing the lead part, which obviously catches all attention anyhow. As soon as an actress is sharing a leading role with an actor or even worse, plays the earlier mentioned supporting character being recognized might turn out to be a problem. Directors, including female directors, pay more attention to the actor than to the actress – it seems to be that the movie business is having more difficulties with emancipation than we have in daily real life. Fortunately, this disrespect of women cannot be experienced with all directors equally, but it happens very often.

As of today, I am playing an investigator in the most famous show on German TV. Of course, we shoot interrogation scenes and it happens with about 95% of the actors and actresses that they are not acting towards me during the scene whether I am doing the questioning or not.

Why are we making life so difficult for one another? I have seen female editors and producers asking intentionally not women directors to shoot a movie, arguing, that they have children, they will not have the power for an energy-sapping shooting. Here I am asking myself: we as women, we are having babies, we work at home and in our jobs, we have to fight resistance and in the end we are not accepted in such functions, because we do not have the energy?!

Why can't a woman be a director? Why do we as women in this business do not receive the right level of respect just because some men claim that we are not having an agreeable voice or body language, just not to appear weak to our surrounding? Why does almost nobody believe that a beautiful looking actress can play strong characters? Where in Germany can we find a Penelope Cruz or Audrey Tautous? And where are they in the other countries? Of course, there are exceptions but unfortunately far too little. The pressure in this business is so huge that sometimes I have the impression that women do not compete only about the little number of roles or director assignments, but that we are competing mainly against ourselves.

Just imagine that in reality our life would end at the age of 35, all women turning that age would be locked away – which means that I wouldn't be here today. Certain characters in movies I can only play with a specific age and the corresponding experience. Our audiences burning desire is to identify themselves with one character on the movie screen. I cannot and I don't want to imagine that there are women in the world who are weak and stupid enough just to wait for the prince on the white horse to come, who kisses them awake and saves them from the evil in the world.

True stories whether in the past, the present, or in the future will always be influenced by strong female characters, something which is also true within our culture. How would our world look today if there had been no Marie Antoinette, Cleopatra, Frida Kahlo or Sophie Scholl? Our world would not only be boring, but in many aspects tragic and many biographies would look very different.

I love the European cinema, we have dared so many adventures so often. Directors such as Almodóvar or Francois Ozon are great examples for these daring adventurers. They love women. European TV shows such as The Killing (Komissarin Lund) or Borgen live by strong female characters in the leading roles. Their success proofs that it is the character alone that counts and not their gender.

In contrast to other countries women in European movies might very well be a bit more usual or ordinary. But still, there is so much more that needs to happen. Of course, I am aware that as a woman we cannot play all characters and every role. Admittedly, a godfather played by an actor potentially embodies the evil more than played by an actress. But that does not mean that there is no female godfather or never will be, more importantly, it does not mean that we as women have to play only the naïve and stupid arm candy of the mafia boss. Why are these female characters not developed on equal footing? Why can't she be just as evil and at the same time as strong as he is and still play an important role in his life? House of Cards is a very good example for all well constructed character line-up … and of course, Games of Thrones.

Still, it encourages me that there are producers and filmmakers, who - without consideration of the gender - think in strong characters only while developing a story. It is a well-known fact, that there are women and man. By now it should equally be well known that strong characters can be played also perfectly by women.

Thank you very much for your attention.