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**“Women and development -
The Advancement of Women in the European
Union“**

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Introduction

Celebrating Europe`s 50th birthday this year also means that Europe`s women can look back with proud on European integration history. From the beginning equality was part of policy shaping and policy making in the Union and influenced positive policies in the member states. This year`s birthday is marked by further progress and engagements from the European institutions adopting a Roadmap for gender equality, a European Pact for gender equality and the creation of the European Institute for gender equality. The 50 years for European women stimulate mixed feelings: Never before so many women in Europe were in parliaments and governments. Never before so many women were integrated into the labour market. Never before so many women finished higher education and were better than men.

Women are becoming frontrunners in the society without becoming the shooting stars of the European political and business environment. Europe with one

female head of government and three elected heads of states is far away from serving as an example for gender equity and equal access to decision-making powers in politics. The same truth counts for women in top positions in the economy especially in the big private companies as well as in the universities. Thus the breaking of the glass ceiling remains top on the agenda of Europe`s women.

1. Equality between women and men in the EU

Equality counts among the values and the objectives of the EU since the foundation of the EU in 1957. Equality law-making was crucial to the gender equality development in the European Union. It was the 20th century promoting equality and implementing equality by legislation, by the introduction of women`s voting rights in the European constitutions and by the introduction of equal access of women to education

and paid work. The European commitment to gender equality is visible in the Treaty, in the directives and recommendations and in the case law of the European Court of Justice. The last century also improved the legal position of women in family law, divorce and heritage law so that women became emancipated. Legal empowerment is a way out of poverty.

European law making supported women in the labour market. It was only with the Treaty on the European Union in Amsterdam in 1999 that equal opportunities got its real place on the political agenda of the Union.

The victory of law in view to the equality of women and men was made possible by the women's movements, the women's associations, the United Nations World Women's Conferences, the innovative cooperation between women in parliament and outside of parliament, the equal opportunities ministries or institutions and last but not least the networking of women worldwide.

The European Union has been pacemaker and has to continue to be pacemaker for the equality of women despite the fact that women are equal before the law. Nevertheless, the gender equality is undermined by the lack of implantation of those laws in real life. The structural gender inequalities persist. The lack of political and economic leadership by women and the dramatic absence of public services for care make these inequalities visible.

Discrimination is forbidden. But discrimination occurs when looking for a job, for a career or for not being dismissed. The EU does not allow also direct or indirect discrimination. This means that the EU does not allow for rules, practices and policies which exclude or give preference to certain persons just because they belong to a particular group.

The EU legislation does not allow for differential and less favourable treatment. This is also true for indirect

discrimination which can be found when so-called neutral norms and practices have a disproportionate effect on one or more identifiable groups without justification. If training courses are offered to employees only outside the working hours only men will be addressed because the care-takers tasks in Europe are with the women. They have no time to attend week-end classes. So very rightly the EU legislation obliges the institutions and member states. Equal opportunities for both men and women are part of the treaty (art. 3, 2, 13 and art. 141) and the Charta of Fundamental Rights /(art. 23). This progress was a consequence out of the world women's conference and the action platform of Beijing 1995. The European commitment on all levels was not only instrumental for the success of the Beijing conference but for further progress in the EU. The EU has the mission to ensure equal opportunities.

The 13 directives of the EU, the many resolutions of the European Parliament and the recommendations of the European Council as well as more than 200

rulings of the European Court of Justice prove the importance of equality policies, its maturity and its concrete impact on the life of women and men.

The EU policy on gender equality reflects the observance of the fundamental right of non-discrimination which belongs to the policies of the four freedoms governing principles of the European single market. Gender equality has besides the human rights perspective also an economic perspective. Competitiveness and sustainable growth in the EU will only have a future if more women become economically active.

The equality reports of the Union show that progress in equality between women and men has been achieved but remains slow and insufficient. The increased diversity of the enlarged Union with 27 member countries, with regard to gender equality makes more action necessary. Without objective, reliable and comparable data it will not be possible to develop effective policies and measures. The

European Institute for Gender Equality in Vilnius is due to collect data, to analyse, to promote dialogue and strengthen networking on gender issues. The 10th anniversary of the Beijing world conference 1995 was marked by the proposal to create a European Institute for Gender Equality in Vilnius which should be a new tool with which to further develop European policy for equal opportunities between women and men. The European Institute for Gender Equality will be a centre of excellence for gender equality issues providing expertise and knowledge

2. EU policies and legislation

Actual policies of the European Union start from the 5th community action programme on gender equality (2001-2006) which has been established on the initiative of the European Parliament in 1979 and contributed to engendering the Community actions, programmes and funds in view to the labour market, the social challenges and the conciliation of work and

family life. The new Gender Roadmap of the European Commission and the new gender pact of the Council of the European Union demonstrate that gender equality is a fundamental policy issue and not only lip service.

The EU approach to gender equality in the economy combines specific actions like legal empowerment for women and gender mainstreaming. Specific measures in particular legislations with the 13 directives regulating mainly employment and access to the labour market, have been crucial. Legislation has been instrumental to eliminate direct and indirect discrimination. Gender mainstreaming implies integrating the gender dimension when a policy is devised and implemented.

Gender Mainstreaming

The principle of gender mainstreaming has been enshrined in the treaty and obliges all European

institutions and the EU member states. Gender mainstreaming is defined as incorporating equal opportunities for women and men into all Community policies and activities. At the same time positive and actions are still used. The European Treaty of Amsterdam was a breakthrough for the integration of equality values and objectives.

The EU defines gender mainstreaming by integrating equality between women and men into all community policies and activities. This means integration of the gender perspective into all stages of policy perspectives; design, finance, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. So the policy impact on the life and position of both women and men and their responsibility to readdress them if necessary is of importance. As it is not easy to put gender mainstreaming into practice there has been a commitment not only in the treaty but also at the highest political level in the Commission and in the Parliament. This commitment needs to permeate the whole

organisation because gender mainstreaming has to be an automatic reflex. The issue of gender equality has to be visible and a central concern in policy shaping, planning and making. All institutions have their own institutional provision.

Gender mainstreaming as a fundamental policy issue can be found in all services and policy areas. This approach reaches from international politics to policies of economic and social cohesion and structural funds. Gender budgeting nevertheless being practiced in 50 member countries of the United Nations has not yet reached the European budget.

The Roadmap for Equality 2006-2010 defines key actions to monitor and strengthen gender mainstreaming in areas like social inclusion, health and long term care, European research policy, education and training.

The European Strategy for Growth and Jobs, the Lisbon Strategy, is a concrete example of successful

gender mainstreaming. The strategy includes among its priorities female entrepreneurship and female employment and overcoming gender gaps in working life. Member states have to reach a female employment rate of at least 60% by 2010.

Specific actions

Specific actions of the European Union can be found in the directives, in the judgements of the court of justice, in numerous recommendations of the European Council and in numerous resolutions of the European Parliament. Only the treaty as primary law of the EU and the directives oblige institutions and member states to undertake specific actions for the advancement of women. Other decision making instruments only invite member states and institutions for action.

Specific actions can be found also in the cohesion and structural policies of the European Union which address specific needs of women. Specific actions of

the European Union want to contribute to gender equality but want also to overcome the concrete and structural discrimination of women. Therefore, the chosen measures address specific problems and challenges of inequality. Specific actions and gender mainstreaming are two sides of the same medal and both complement each other, and address the crucial questions of gender empowerment.

3. Advancement of Women in the Economy

Women`s participation in the labour markets in the last decades grew substantially but still is too low. The Nordic countries count a 70% employment rate contributing to their human rights` status and their economic wealth. Continental and especially Southern European countries are lacking behind and do not have a 60%-female-employment rate. Even increased employment rates did not always lead to increased opportunities and economic autonomy of women because most of the women have part-time, temporary and other forms of precarious jobs. The

higher unemployment rate of women than men remains a fact as well as their activities concentrated in the services and agricultural sector with so-called female job options. So the continuing segregated labour market between women and men, continues to exist.

Only decent and productive work is a sustainable way out of poverty. In Europe poverty is linked to unemployment. Especially single mothers are those having limited chances. Access to decent and well paid employment guarantees the economic independence of both women and men. In the European Union women are the majority of the population. But the employment rate of women is 15% below that of men. 1/3 of women work on a part-time basis but less than 7% of men do. Women on average earn 15% less than men. The pay gap with men in the private sector often exceeds 20%. This also counts for the managerial level. Within European companies women represent one manager in three, one member

of the board in ten and a mere 3% of the big bosses in the biggest companies. And even then they earn less than male managers.

Despite the fact that more women than men study (59% of all students are women) women are concentrated in a limited number of occupations than men mainly in less valued social activities such as care and education. Given that women outnumber men in higher education this situation represents a worrying waste of human capital and public funds.

The public sector shows progress because equality laws oblige for equal treatment. In most member countries the principle of equal treatment also applies to the private sector. This is crucial because most women work in the small and medium companies in the private sector. In Germany for example this is not the case. You cannot find the same legal obligations for employment as foreseen in the public sector. Only voluntary agreements oblige private companies to

respect gender equality.

Women and economic leadership

Despite the fact that women continue to be underrepresented in economic leadership in Europe there has been progress in the last decades. Women count at least for 20% of the economic leadership positions. But if you look to the decision-making positions in the highest decision-making bodies of top publicly quoted companies not more than 12% of the posts are in the hand of women. Best performers in Europe are the Scandinavian countries striving for a 40% quota in participation. Norway, Sweden and Spain actually want to sanction companies not respecting this quota in refusing their listing.

Women as entrepreneurs

Every fourth enterprise in Europe now is founded by woman. Compared with the US there is not enough entrepreneurial activity in the EU and women are even less likely than men to set up in business. This often

results from the lack to finance which women experience. They do not have the same access to finances as men. This might be linked to a perception of discrimination (whether intentional or unintentional) on the part of finance providers. But also the lack of knowledge on IT-usage or on the bureaucratic steps towards entrepreneurship alienate women from becoming entrepreneurs.

Specific measures to assist women entrepreneurs have been introduced in many countries. Building networks between women entrepreneurs is one very important tool. With the programme “Promoting entrepreneurship amongst women” the EU wants to change the situation and encourage women to become entrepreneurs.

Better Balance of family responsibilities

Equality of women and men has not become reality in Europe because the prejudices and role expectations

in a lot of European countries have not changed to the better of partnership solutions. Family responsibilities are mostly with women being left alone. The best performing countries in view to conciliation practices in childcare and care are the Nordic countries, being top in the ranking of UNDP's gender index. Those countries have not only changed behaviour and patterns but have also guaranteed care for children sick and elderly people. Without better and more public services for care the equality of women in the labour market cannot be achieved.

The lack of child care services, career setbacks, the risk of losing skills, financial factors, difficulties of returning to employment and the pressure to conform to stereotypes restrict the free choice of individuals to reconcile their professional and private lives. Therefore, rightly the European member states obliged themselves to offer up to the year 2010 child care facilities for 90% of the children between 3 and 6 years and 33% for children less than 3 years. Affordable care services for elderly are also on the

agenda.

4. Approaches and machineries to foster gender equality in the economy

There is lot of legislation in favour of equality. Good governance in equality is missing. There is lack of coherence. Effective enforcement mechanisms, specialised bodies and machineries, and institutional setups which can counter gender discrimination could be improved. Comprehensive policies and positive actions are visible in the Scandinavian countries or on a case by case basis in the UK and Ireland.

The 1970s and 1980s saw in Europe the birth of a sort of state feminism integrating gender equality and women into all levels of political institutions and public administration. Later the national equality legislation introduced not only the ban on discrimination but also special equality bodies. Besides legal procedures and appeals to the courts special ombudspersons were set up for example in the Scandinavian countries in

order to deal efficiently with discrimination cases.

In France and Germany there were also various governmental bodies to promote equality. Ministries for women affairs have been started but failed to really change the agenda because of their marginal position in the government structure and because of lack of financial means and human resources, gender specific data and research. Ireland and the UK had another approach starting from an early sex discrimination act and the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Commission overseeing the implementation of the law. This Commission was formally independent of the government but totally dependent of government financing its function.

The UN convention on the elimination of all form of discrimination against women, the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of women and the Beijing Platform of Action were calling for national machineries for the advancement of women. A gender equality machinery can be an institutional

governmental and a parliamentary structure which ensures equality and human rights as well as the advancement of women. Its main function is to monitor and oversee the implementation of the law, the principle non-discrimination and equality between women and men. The success of such a machinery does not only depend on the institutional set up and solid financing but it also on the support of civil society especially the women's movement in its various forms but also women studies and research. Networking is part of implementing equality policies.

Actually 44% of the EU member states do have Gender equality ministries or secretaries of state or other ministries for gender equality and 44% have Gender equality divisions, units or departments. 16% organise operational gender focal points, 12% independent gender equality ministries, 32% interdependent gender equality centres, 48% multiparty government commissions, committees or councils for gender equality and 44% inter-ministerial consultation groups for gender equality. The EU has

played a pioneering role in the development of institutional mechanisms which are indispensable for the promotion of gender equality. The EU legislation and policies was a window of opportunity for the EU member states being obliged to respect gender equality.

But still there are challenges.

5. Advancement of Women in politics

The political rights of women were at the core of women`s movements in Europe in the two last centuries and finally women`s liberation movements got the active and passive voting rights. But there were more Romeos in European politics than Julias to bring it down to Shakespeare`s words. This has been unacceptable and against normality in a democratic society where everybody has the right to participate. The equal access to political posts in the European Union has been improved in the last decades. So Europe now counts 31% women members of the European Parliament and 26% women members in

the European Commission. National parliaments have on average 23% female parliamentarians with the best performer Sweden with more than 45%. 23% ministers in Europe are women: the hero is Finland with 60% women ministers, Spain and France with a 50% participation rate are good performers. Among the heads of states or governments only four are women.

Countries and political parties with specific activities and measures to promote women have been most successful in giving women equal access to power. This especially applies to the quota system which obliges countries, institutions or political parties in constitutions, electoral laws or simple laws which should favour the equal access of women and men to electoral mandates and offices. More than 80 countries world-wide know about and practice quota rules. The equal participation of women and men in politics reflects the level of democracy in a given society because a true democracy cannot and does

not exclude women. The goal is not simply to elect more women to positions of power. The gender ramifications of all policies have to be changed in order to establish policies and programmes that will enhance women's equality and empowerment. Therefore, in the European Union, the discussion is rich on affirmative actions to promote women. They reach from preparing more gender balanced lists of candidates, more gender representation in party structures, the propositions of women to leadership positions, the scrutiny of the media to ensure that women's issues are put onto the public agenda and that women are well represented in public positions. Programmes are supported which address women in a positive way, which address gender differences and inequalities and which can contribute to overcome discrimination.

6. Conclusion

Despite progress in equality one of the most brutal problems for women persists: violence against

women. Every fourth woman in Europe has known and still knows physical violence. Violence is one of the most important causes for women dying all over the world. As this violence is exerted mainly by family members legal means are limited in their effects. Very often violence is also sexual violence in the form of rape, forced prostitution, sexual harassment or women trafficking. Until now the EU member states have promised action and promoted programmes to help battered women, but there is no common legal base to punish the committers on an equal basis. European actions are not enough worldwide international common action is needed in order to make violence disappear in the relationship between men and women. This objective should unite women worldwider.

A lot still has been done in Europe to reach gender equality. The last hundred years contributed to women's emancipation, gender equality and empowerment of women.

Comparing the beginning of the international decade

of women 1975 and the first World Women`s Conference it is easy to realise that progress has happened. Law making is on the side of those governing this world. But law is only one instrument for achieving gender equality. EU and national governmental bodies and the respective civil society actions reflect a broader focus on gender equality but also miss opportunities to change reality. This has to do with traditional power patterns. It is easier for a woman to become a CEO of an enterprise or chief manager if she is a wife, widow or daughter of the owner than for a career woman.

Europe is a powerhouse in view to equality if compared with most EU member states in their national policies. And they had to adapt because of EU policies. But nevertheless culture, values, traditions still play a very important role in Europe so that it remains a challenge to overcome the European patriarchal society. If you want to achieve human society you have to surpass the male society.

Gender-based stereotyping can be found in all areas

of society as a determinant factor and smallest common denominator for gender inequalities and unbalanced participation. Therefore action is needed to encourage member states, to eliminate all forms of gender stereotypes in education and training, culture, media, labour market and decision making and to promote empowerment of girls and women in society. Equally important is the increase of women's employment and participation on all levels, readdressing of the gender imbalance in the field of education and training as well as the increased participation of migrant women in all areas of society.

In Europe media, roles and stereotypes still are difficult to change so that the patterns of a patriarchal society prevail. Women and men are not working side by side because the social environment does not guarantee full access to equal opportunities. New policies are required to overcome the gender employment and pay gap. Crucially needed are quota approaches and more gender-equality enhancing

practices in companies, at the workplace as well as in the societies as a whole.

In the European Union the Amsterdam Treaty and the two directives on non-discrimination helped to cope with discrimination. All member states are obliged to designate national bodies to combat discrimination. This will hopefully work also in favour of gender equality. For the majority of women it is far more important to find mechanisms to establish pay equality. This has to do with the appreciation of feminised sectors of work from the shop keeper to the teacher and doctor. But it has also to do with the pay equity commissions in different European member states like Sweden, Spain and UK.

Gender equality still is an issue concerning access to capital and knowledge and innovation. This is not only a problem for women on third continents but also for Europe. Therefore fortunately a lot but not sufficient initiatives have been undertaken by the EU. Microeconomic and macroeconomic policies and employment guidelines lead to growth and jobs in

Europe still lack the gender perspective. They are crucial to further development.

The message for the future is clear: it is necessary to gender all EU policies, commitments and engagements but at the same time to contribute to specific actions for equality and empowerment of women. Women's organisations have to become stronger and improve networking in an international women's move for gender equality and empowerment. The international dimension has not to be forgotten. All women of this world should unite in order to call for a gender master plan of all governments in respect to the Millennium goals. Forgetting about women means organising defeat. But we want to make equality happen!