Equality between women and men in the European Union — 2009

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The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Marc TARABELLA (S&D, BE) on equality between women and men in the European Union – 2009. It congratulates the Commission for emphasising in its report the importance of strengthening gender equality policies at a time of economic upheaval, but points to the need for further practical action and new policies. Members are critical of the fact that economic recovery projects mainly focus on male dominated employment. They underline that support for the future of men's rather than women's employment increases rather than decreases gender inequality, and insist that gender equality must be mainstreamed in European, national and international plans for economic recovery.

Parliament urges the Council, Commission and Member States to take certain measures to defend social rights and to guarantee that the economic and financial crisis will not lead to cuts in social benefits and social services, in particular child care and care for the elderly. These include the following:

- conduct gender-specific impact assessments before implementing austerity policies, so that women will not be disproportionately affected;

- prepare recovery policies that reflect the specific needs and circumstances of women and men, particularly through the use of gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting.

Improve the quality of work for women: Parliament welcomes the fact that the target of a 60% female employment rate by 2010, set at the Lisbon European Council of March 2000, will soon be reached, but notes that a high proportion of the jobs concerned are, regrettably, insecure and poorly paid. It deplores also the major disparities among the Member States, with rates ranging from 37.4% in Malta to 74.3% in Denmark, and asks the Member States, therefore, to take the measures needed in order to apply Directive 2006/54/EC effectively. Members also suggest other measures, such as (i) giving consideration to the situation of spouses helping in small family businesses and developing the legal construct of shared ownership, in order to ensure full recognition of women's rights in the agricultural sector; (ii) positive action to integrate women in projects and programmes on ecological transformation, i.e. in the renewables sector, and (iii) promoting female entrepreneurship in the industrial sector.

Equal pay for equal work: Members point out that women's personal income and paid employment remains key to their economic autonomy. They are exposed to a higher risk of poverty because the gender pay gap has remained stubbornly wide. Member States are asked to apply Directive 2006/54/EC immediately and, in particular, to promote the principal of 'equal pay for equal work' or that of 'work of equal value'. Action should also be taken with a view to reducing pension disparities between women and men. Parliament deplores the fact that the Commission has not yet responded to the resolution of 18 November 2008 with a legislative proposal for revision of the existing legislation relating to the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women. It also proposes making 22 February 'International Equal Pay Day'.

European Charter of Women's rights: Parliament wishes to see a European charter of women's rights established as soon as possible in order to bring about real improvement in women's rights throughout the Union and to introduce machinery for ensuring gender equality in all areas of social, economic and political life. The Commission and Member States are asked to run awareness-raising campaigns in schools, workplaces and the media in order to promote diversification of career choices, especially for

girls, and combat persistent sexist stereotyping and degrading images, with particular emphasis on campaigns that highlight men's role in better sharing of family responsibilities.

Facilitate work-life balance: Member States are asked to foster the spread of good practices in this area. Members emphasise the importance of pre-school childcare provision, child-minding services and the provision of assistance to elderly persons. Whilst Parliament congratulates the Commission on the steps it has taken and particularly on its proposals for revision of Directive 92/85/EEC in relation to maternity protection and Directive 86/613/EC in relation to 'assisting spouses' in family businesses, it considers that the Commission's proposed revision of Directive 92/85/EEC falls short of what would be desirable from the point of view of promoting work-life balance for men and women. It maintains that paternity leave is an issue that needs to be addressed.

More women in positions of responsibility: Member States are asked to take effective steps, notably through legislation, to encourage gender balance in corporate, administrative and political positions of responsibility, with binding targets to ensure the equal representation of women and men. Parliament notes in this regard the positive effects of the use of electoral quotas on the representation of women. It welcomes the significant increase in the numbers of female chairs of parliamentary committees and female EP vice-presidents. Members consider in this regard that the proportion of women Commissioners-designate (representing 33% of the total) - achieved with great difficulty - is the bare minimum. In future nominations, there should be two candidates, one of each gender, so as to facilitate the composition of a more representative Commission.

Migrant women: Parliament asks Member States for measures to promote the integration of migrants while also ensuring that they are given access to education and training, and courses in the language of their host country. It asks for particular note to be taken of more vulnerable groups of women – disabled women, women with dependants, elderly women, minority and immigrant women and women prisoners – and to develop targeted measures to meet their needs.

Fight against trafficking: Members call on the Czech Republic, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Hungary, the Netherlands, Finland and Sweden to act at once to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. They point out that violence against women is still a major problem, and call on the Commission to establish a European Year for combating violence against women. Parliament endorses the Spanish Presidency's proposals to establish a European inter-gender violence monitoring centre and introduce the European protection order for victims and a common EU-wide telephone helpline for victims. It urges the Council and Commission to establish a clear legal basis for combating all forms of violence against women, including trafficking.

Sexual and reproductive rights: Parliament emphasises that women must have control over their sexual and reproductive rights, notably through easy access to contraception and abortion. Women must have access free of charge to consultation on abortion, and Parliament supports actions to improve women's access to sexual and reproductive health services and to raise their awareness of their rights and of available services.