Eliminating gender stereotypes in the EU

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The European Parliament adopted by 368 votes to 159, with 98 abstentions, a resolution on eliminating gender stereotypes in the EU.

Parliament stresses that despite some progress having been made in many Member States, many women continue to carry a disproportionate share of the burden when it comes to raising children and domestic responsibilities hence hindering the achievement of equality in the labour market.

Despite the EU's commitment to equality between men and women, there is still a gap in legislation providing for non-discrimination against women and gender equality in the areas of social security, education and the media, employment and wages. The resolution emphasises the need to step up implementation of existing legislation in these areas and bring in new legislation.

In this context, the Commission is called upon to:

- mainstream the issue of gender equality in all policy fields;
- make efficient use of available EU funding for this purpose;
- support measures by Member States to eliminate stereotypes and promote stereotype free access for all to education and employment;
- develop strategies that attack the root causes of discrimination and violence against women.

In addition and contrary to committee's position, Parliament did not accept the measure calling on Member States to recognise the urgent need to consider the introduction of a regulatory framework which prohibits the way girls and women are displayed as sexual objects by the alcohol industry.

The resolution also focuses on key issues with a view to eliminating stereotypes:

- Media and culture: highlighting that in the media and in particular in advertising, 60% of the roles portrayed doing housework or looking after children are in fact women, Parliament calls on the Commission, the Member States, civil society and advertising self-regulatory bodies to cooperate closely in order to combat such practices, notably by using effective tools which guarantee respect for human dignity and probity in marketing and advertising. Member States are called upon to conduct training and awareness training actions with media professionals on the harmful effects of gender stereotypes and good practices in this area. In this regard, Parliament stresses the need to run special courses on gender stereotypes in the media for national advertising standards committees and self-regulatory and regulatory bodies so as to raise awareness of the **negative influence** of gender-discriminatory images on television, the internet and in marketing and advertising campaigns. It calls on the EU to develop awareness campaigns on **zero-tolerance** across the EU.

Members also call for the: (i) implementation of positive action measures to ensure that more women have access to management positions in the media, including top management positions; (ii) conducting of research and compile comparable data concerning women and the media; (iii) combating of the sexualisation of girls not only by compiling the necessary data, promoting good practices and organising information campaigns, but also by providing financial support for measures taken in the Member States, in particular for women's organisations fighting against sexualisation and violence against women and girls.

- Education and training: Parliament stresses the need for special career guidance courses in **primary and secondary schools and higher education institutions**, in order to inform young people about the negative consequences of gender stereotypes. In this context, it stresses the importance of promoting equality between men and women from a very young age in order effectively to combat gender-based stereotypes, discrimination and violence. There is a need for a gender mainstreaming process in schools and for them to design and implement awareness training exercises and practical exercises designed to promote gender equality in the academic curriculum. Training courses for teachers, supervisors, head teachers and all other people involved in children's education should be established.

Members call on the Member States to **assess the syllabus and content of school textbooks, with a view to a reform leading to the integration of gender issues into all education material as a cross-cutting theme, in terms of both eliminating gender stereotypes** and making women's contribution and role in history, literature, the arts, etc. more visible, including at the earliest school levels.

- Labour market: Parliament stresses the impact of gender stereotypes on education and training has strong implications for the labour market, where women still face both horizontal and vertical segregation. This contributes to certain sectors still being considered 'male' (with more than 85% men) and their pay levels consequently being higher than those of sectors considered 'female' (with more than 70% women). The resolution draws attention to the growing concern about the negative influence of gender stereotypes on the **gender pay gap of 16.4%.** The resolution recalls that gender stereotypes on the labour market still limit women's access to certain sectors, such as engineering, fire-fighting, manufacturing, construction, carpentry, mechanics, the technical and scientific sectors and new technologies, but also limit men's access to childcare sectors (midwives, nursery nurses, etc.).

To combat **gender pay discrimination**, Parliament calls for a series of proposals which may be summarised as follows: (i) awareness-raising activities in order to inform employers and employees of the link between gender stereotypes and the gender pay and job gap; (ii) review wage structures in female-dominated professions and occupations as a means of breaking down gender stereotypes anchored in the pay gap problem; (iii) establish policies to increase the number of inexpensive and high-quality childcare facilities available to working parents; (iv) provide **flexible working opportunities** and suitable forms of parental leave for both men and women.

Members call on the Commission to **promote gender quotas in occupations that are traditionally considered as 'male' or 'female'**, since stereotypes also come from the scarcity of women or men in certain positions. The report reminds the Commission that elderly women are particularly affected by the gender pay gap as it also affects **pensions**, which increases the risk of extreme and persistent poverty once women have reached retirement age.

Parliament emphasises that gender stereotypes have a tendency to be self-fulfilling and that, if women are never given the chance to prove themselves, they will never manage to break the barriers blocking their way.

Plenary does not maintain the report's position which favours gender quotas in occupations that are traditionally considered as 'male' or 'female'. Rather, it considers that the strategies should include **positive action**, life-long learning and active encouragement for girls to undertake studies in areas which are not traditionally seen as 'feminine', such as information technology or mechanics, and to support work-life balance measures for both men and women.

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- Economic and political decision-making: the resolution states that, in 2012, in the European Union, women represented 14% of the board members of the largest listed companies, suggesting the existence of a so-called **'glass ceiling'** that makes it difficult for women to secure top management jobs and equal opportunities for promotion. It urges the introduction of awareness and incentive campaigns, encouraging women to be more politically active and to run for local or national government.

At EU level, Members call on Member States to support parity by proposing a **woman and a man as their candidates for the office of European Commissioner**.

Recalling that in 2010, only 12% of the members of management boards in Europe were women, Parliament supports the Commission's desire to establish binding quotas for women in posts of responsibility in the largest listed companies.

Lastly, Parliament proposes a series of actions including to **combat violence against women**, to promote further research on the root causes of gender stereotypes and the impact of stereotypes on gender equality; to exchange new ideas and research on best practices with a view to eliminating gender stereotypes in the Member States and the EU institutions; to develop safeguards (in the form of ombudspersons or media-watch authorities incorporating gender equality experts) in order to ensure that industrial codes of conduct include a gender equality perspective and are adhered to.