EU strategy for equality between women and men post 2015

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The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted an own-initiative report by Maria NOICHL (S&D, DE) on the EU Strategy for equality between women and men post 2015.

Members recalled that gender equality is a basic value of the EU and that the EU has assumed the specific task of integrating it in all its activities. They noted that the EU cannot remain tied to redundant and environmentally unsustainable economic models based on an outdated distribution of work along gender lines which has been superseded by the integration of women in the labour market. They suggested, on the contrary, a new, socially sustainable model based on knowledge and innovation that **incorporates the full range of women's talents in the productive fabric**.

It is within this context that they made a number of general recommendations which may be summarised as follows:

- drawing up and adopting a new separate strategy for Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Europe aimed at creating equal opportunities and based on the priority areas of the previous strategy with a view to ending all forms of discrimination suffered by women in the labour market, with respect to wages, pensions, decision-making, access to goods and services, reconciliation of family and working life and all forms of violence against women and to removing discriminatory structures and practices related to gender;
- taking into account the multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination, including women with disabilities, migrant and ethnic minority women;
- adopting a common position as soon as possible on the proposal for a Council directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age, gender or sexual orientation, which has been blocked since its adoption by Parliament in April 2009;
- strengthening, by the Member States, enforcing the full exercise of collective bargaining in the private and public sectors, as an indispensable tool for regulating labour relations, fighting wage discrimination and promoting equality;
- clarifying the role that it wishes the EU to play in the world and in working with the Member States, including their competent authorities with regard to the promotion of gender equality, both within and outside the Union's borders, and to pursue these goals both through the concept of gender mainstreaming in all areas and through individual targeted and specific actions;
- integrating the gender perspective and the fight against gender violence into EU foreign policy, development cooperation policy and international trade policy and to safeguard the necessary financial instruments and human resources.

Members called on the Commission and Council to ensure that gender equality is incorporated in all the programmes, actions and initiatives launched under that strategy and to introduce a specific pillar for equality between women and men within the strategy, to consider the objectives of the future strategy as an aspect of the European Semester.

Members called on the Commission and the Member States to gather, analyse and publish reliable statistical data broken down by gender and gender equality indicators in all policy areas and at all levels of governance.

The Commission is called upon to draft the strategy in the form of a **practical action plan** covering the areas of violence against women, work and time, women in power and decision-making, financial resources, health, knowledge, education and the media, the wider world and institutional mechanisms and gender mainstreaming.

They emphasised the need to introduce, where applicable and in full respect of the EU's competences, legislative inputs in order to strengthen the legal framework for gender equality.

More specifically, further action is recommended in the following areas:

- **violence against women**: Members reiterated their call for a strengthened approach by Member States to the prevention and suppression of all forms of violence against women and girls. They called on the Commission to include a definition of gender-based violence in line with the provisions of Directive 2012/29/EU in the future strategy and to present a comprehensive strategy on violence against women and girls and gender-based violence that contains a binding legislative act as soon as possible. They called on the Council to activate the passerelle clause by adopting a unanimous decision adding gender-based violence to the areas of crime listed in Article 83(1) TFEU. The report called for 2016 to be designated as the European Year for combating violence against women and girls. The Commission is called upon to enshrine 'zero tolerance' campaigns making society more aware of the problem of violence against women;
- **work and time**: Members stressed the importance of flexible forms of work in allowing women and men to reconcile work and family life, provided the worker is free to make the choice, and instructed the Commission to coordinate and promote exchanges of best practices. They encouraged men's participation and the introduction of paternity leave of at least 10 days and parental leave available to both parents but with **strong incentives for fathers**. Members also called for the adoption of the necessary measures to promote higher employment rates among women, such as affordable care and childcare and adequate maternity;
- **women in power and decision-making**: Members called for specific measures to promote the equal representation of women and men in leadership positions in the strategy, and to support the Council in the negotiations for the adoption of the directive for a balanced representation of men and women on non-executive boards. They also called on Member States to create a more balanced representation of women and men in municipal councils, regional and national parliaments and the European Parliament;
- **financial resources**: Members reiterated that Directive 2006/54/EC, in its current form, is not sufficiently effective to tackle the gender pay gap. This directive should be revised without delay;
- **health**: the Commission is urged to include sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHRs) in its next EU Health Strategy, in order to ensure equality between women and men and complement national SRHR policies. Members called on the Commission and the Member States to act to **implement sex education programmes in schools**. Members called for high-quality, geographically appropriate and readily accessible services in the areas of sexual and reproductive health and rights and **safe and legal abortion and contraception**, as well as general healthcare;
- **culture, education, media**: Members called on the Commission to support programmes to raise awareness of stereotypes, sexism and traditional gender roles in the education and media sector and emphasised in this regard that combating bullying and prejudice against LGBTI persons in schools.
- **international dimension**: amongst other recommendations, Members underscored that it is absolutely necessary to integrate the gender perspective in all elements of food safety programming, because women are responsible for 80% of agriculture in Africa. They stressed the importance of a gender-sensitive asylum and migration policy. Members also emphasised the right to voluntarily access family planning services, including safe and legal abortion-related care. They urged that the provision of humanitarian aid by the EU and the Member States should not be subject to restrictions imposed by other partner donors regarding necessary medical treatment, including access to safe abortion for women and girls who are victims of rape in armed conflicts.

Lastly, Members called for an institutional mechanisms, gender mainstreaming, gender budgeting and gender impact assessment in all areas and for each legislative proposal at all levels of governance. They called on the Commission to collaborate with the Parliament and the Council and to call an **annual EU summit for gender equality and women's rights**, to identify progress made, and to make renewed commitments.

It should be noted that in a minority opinion, Beatrix VON STORCH (ECR, DE) rejected the call for abortion to be recognised as a human right.