Rights of women in the Eastern Partnership States

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The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted the own-initiative report by Mariya GABRIEL (EPP, BG) on the rights of women in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) States.

Members recalled that in the EaP States, only 17 of 136 senior ministerial positions were held by women in 2015, on average women constituted 16 % of the elected Members of Parliament, and on average women accounted for only 17 % of the highest-ranking civil service positions. Moreover, only three political parties in the whole region were led by women. Members noted that vertical and horizontal segregation of women's employment in the labour markets of the EaP States remains deeply entrenched in their cultural and social norms.

In general, Members considered the situation in the area of women's rights in the EaP countries to be in need of improvement. They pointed out that profound economic changes and economic uncertainty have had a negative effect on the economic situation of women, leading to shortcomings in their *de facto* equality. It is for this reason that Members called on the EaP countries to overcome gaps in their anti-discrimination frameworks, and for greater use of legislation against discrimination on the grounds of sex, including greater use of international standards in judicial decisions, in order to increase the enforceability of laws. They noted that the situation of LGBTI individuals is still precarious and alarming.

Participation of women in decision-making processes: Members stressed the noticeable absence of women from the structures of power in the EaP States and called for equal access to power and representation of women at all levels of government and decision-making.

Moreover, Members supported women's participation and role in governmental and non-governmental anti-corruption organisations, actions and programmes and in the fight against corruption but also in electoral observation missions.

Economic participation of women: Members deplored the fact that women are employed to a much greater extent in services and state sectors with significantly lower wages than in the sectors employing a majority of males, that the gender pay gap remains high and can be as much as 50 %, and that women encounter cultural and sociological barriers in their access to managerial positions, as is also often the case in the EU. They also regretted the fact that women are predominantly active in low-paying sectors despite their higher levels of education in all EaP countries.

They highlighted that the protective legal provisions existing in some EaP countries, prohibiting the employment of women in potentially dangerous occupations, restrict the access of women to certain professions and work and further limit their possibilities in the labour market. They encouraged these countries to review such provisions.

Members encouraged the development of a social economy for women and facilitation of the use of microcredits as a tool for economic independence of women. Furthermore, they called for equal access to education for women and girls and for the elimination of all forms of child labour (e.g. Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan).

Violence against women: Members expressed the need to combat domestic violence and gender-based violence, including sexual harassment. They condemned the use of sexual violence against women and

girls as weapons of war, including mass rape and recalled that they are classified in the Rome Statute as war crimes.

The EaP countries are urged to sign and ratify the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women. They are also urged to dedicate more resources to combating all forms of violence against women, including amending legal instruments and providing assistance to victims of violence.

Members urged the governments to increase efforts to investigate and prosecute suspected traffickers and convict labour and sex traffickers and to support NGO partners that provide rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims.

Women's role in peaceful resolution of conflicts: Members encouraged further efforts towards the peaceful resolution of conflicts and called for greater involvement of women in such processes, in line with UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 2242 on Women, Peace and Security. They called for specific protection for women and girls seeking asylum.

Examples of best practice: Members pointed out positive examples of greater inclusion of women in conflict resolution and reconciliation, such as the Trans-Caucasus Women's Peace and Security Dialogue, established in 1994 and developed by the National Peace Foundation (US), which was created in order for women in Caucasus to work on projects such as the rehabilitation of child victims of war, training for peace and democracy building. They supported empowerment projects that raise women's self-confidence.

EU support in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy: Members underlined that in the last five years EUR 103 million have been spent on 121 projects and programmes to promote gender equality in the European neighbourhoods, including the EUR 5 million **Women in Business** Programme in the Eastern Partnership countries. They recognised that significant support has already been provided by the EU towards achieving goals in the area of women's rights and gender equality, including through TAIEX peer-to-peer assistance that helps with public administration reform and promotes cooperation on fundamental principles and policies.

They urged the need to include women's rights and gender equality issues on the agendas of regular political and human rights dialogues with the Eastern Partnership countries.

They stressed the need to provide support from the ENI to grassroots women's organisations and civil society, which are best positioned to reach out to local populations and help to raise awareness and tackle problems encountered by women and girls in the regions.