Rights of women in the Eastern Partnership States

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The European Parliament adopted by 505 votes to 68, with 103 abstentions, a resolution on the rights of women in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) States.

Parliament 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.

Parliament 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, Parliament considered the situation in the area of women's rights in the EaP countries to be in need of improvement. It 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.

Parliament expressed the need for the EaP countries to take immediate action to increase equality between women and men in society, including adoption of national action plans and cooperation with international organisations and civil society stakeholders.

Moreover, it noted that in some EaP countries, the situation of LGBTI individuals is still precarious. It called on the national authorities to be vigilant and firm and to impose penalties on people who insult or stigmatise LGBTI people.

Participation of women in decision-making processes: Parliament 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, it 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: Parliament 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. It also regretted the fact that women are predominantly active in low-paying sectors despite their higher levels of education in all EaP countries.

Members 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.

Parliament 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, it 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: Parliament expressed the need to combat domestic violence and gender-based violence, including sexual harassment. It 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.

It also called for the application of the Beijing Platform for Action to education and health as basic human rights, including access to **voluntary family planning**.

Parliament urged the governments to increase efforts to investigate and prosecute suspected traffickers and convict labour and sex traffickers, to protect the integrity of the women concerned according to the 'Nordic model' and to support NGO partners that provide rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims.

Women's role in peaceful resolution of conflicts: Parliament 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. It called for specific protection for women and girls seeking asylum.

Examples of best practice: Parliament 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. It supported empowerment projects that raise women's self-confidence.

EU support in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy: Parliament 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. It 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.

The Commission is called upon to **use gender mainstreaming in all areas of the ENP and ENI**, thus ensuring that specific gender equality targets are developed and monitored.

It 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.

Lastly, it stressed the need to provide support from the European Neighbourhood Instrument (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.