Women in the South-East of Europe

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The European Parliament adopted an own-initiative report on women in South-East Europe drafted by Anna KARAMANOU (PES, GR). Parliament considers it essential for the countries of South-East Europe to ensure the incorporation of gender mainstreaming into their stabilisation, democratisation and negotiation strategies in all areas of economic, political and social life, as well as the adoption of measures to combat discrimination against women in all fields within the public and private domains. It stresses the importance of legal provisions for gender equality and of ensuring conditions and mechanisms for their implementation (institutional, financial, human resources and knowledge base for gender policy).

In view of the importance of respecting human rights and minorities in this vulnerable region of the Balkans, Parliament calls on the countries of the region and potential applicants for membership of the EU to sign and ratify the 1950 Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Parliament notes with anxiety that domestic violence and abusive talk which demeans women in the media remain matters of particular concern in all the countries of South-East Europe, and that different national reports show that the countries in the region are still at an early stage in the organisation of their struggle against various forms of violence against women (ranging from verbal to physical violence) and discrimination based on sex.

Parliament stresses that reproductive and sexual rights are seriously threatened, while the health of women, especially those in minority groups and rural communities, has been seriously jeopardised by stressful conditions due to wars and difficult transitions, the 'economy of survival', which relies on intensive use of women's human resources, increasing violence against women and the fact that the health system in many countries in the region has collapsed; draws attention to the generally bad situation of health-care institutions and infrastructures, with decreasing public investment in health care systems.

Parliament is satisfied that women's life expectancy has improved significantly, but deplores the fact that Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania continue to spend the smallest proportion (between 2.9% and 5%) of their budgets on expenditure in the area of health care.

As with the participation of the applicant countries in the development of the pre-accession strategy, Parliament calls on the Commission to encourage the participation of the countries of South-East Europe in Community programmes to promote equality between women and men and in particular the Community action programmes on: gender equality (2001-2005), combating discrimination (2001-2006) and preventive measures to fight violence against children, young persons and women (DAPHNE).

Parliament calls on the countries of South-East Europe to ensure by all appropriate means that educational materials, the media and advertising do not promote the model of a patriarchal society that offends women's rights but, on the contrary, help to promote a positive image of women, based on respect for their dignity and the principle of equality between women and men.

Parliament takes into account the highly important role played by women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, in maintaining respect for differences, in building peace and in building bridges in citizen awareness in order to create a climate of reconciliation, respect for differences, the peaceful coexistence of

different races and a common vision, calls on the countries of the region to mainstream a gender perspective into negotiations for conflict prevention and resolution, peacekeeping operations, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts.

Parliament calls for support for regional women's networks and cooperation with similar EU networks.

It notes with concern the lack of statistical information and research-based knowledge necessary for policy making, monitoring and proper evaluation of the situation of women in all the countries concerned; suggests the establishment of permanent contacts, through the Commission's delegations, with the relevant local, national and international institutions and NGOs working in the region in order to collect all available and useful data on issues relating to gender and the situation of women.

- Albania : Parliament deplores the fact that Albania has long been identified as a source and transit country for trafficking in women and children through well-organised criminal networks boosted by a high level of corruption; calls on the government of Albania to address more vigorously the issues of corruption and the sexual exploitation of women and children;

- Bulgaria : Parliament welcomes the establishment of the Consultative Commission on Equal Opportunities for women and men and the Commission on Prevention of Discrimination under the new anti-discrimination Act, but recalls that Bulgaria is the only accession country with no implementation mechanisms in the field of gender equality, these being conditions sine qua non for the proper transposition of the EU acquis;

- Bosnia and Herzegovina : Parliament regrets the increasing tolerance of violence against women , which is also due to the prevalence of negative patriarchal traditions and practices; welcomes the efforts made to adopt a law which will punish domestic violence;

- Croatia : national courts are still slow and inefficient in prosecuting all forms of violence against women, and calls on Croatia's government to remedy this judicial inefficiency and to duly prosecute crimes of violence against women;

- Greece : the representation of women in elected bodies, government, trade unions and political parties remains low. The Government is asked to remedy and increase their efforts to ensure a gender balance in the political and economic decision-making process;

- FYROM : in practice, there are no adequate mechanisms for full implementation of legal provisions on gender equality. In addition, it deplores the fact that sexual abuse of girls within the family is not perceived as a problem in FYROM even though the centres for social work indicate a widespread occurrence of this type of violence. It stresses that the legislation of FYROM has no provisions on the crime of trafficking in women, which seriously hampers the effective prosecution of this phenomenon; calls on its government to draw up legislation and standards in this field;

- Romania : Parliament notes that Romania remains seriously afflicted by trafficking in human beings. Parliament regrets that many ethnically motivated crimes against Roma women still take place in Romania. A number of specific problems remain to be tackled by the government, such as the lack of knowledge about, and the unavailability of, contraceptives, high levels of domestic violence against women, the plight of women from minorities and forced marriages of underage girls; calls on the Romanian government to take the measures necessary to speed up the process of complying with the body of existing European law;

- Serbia and Montenegro : Parliament condemns the collapse of the trail against the Montenegro deputy state prosecutor and three other men for their involvement in sex slavery after the Prosecutor's Office halted criminal proceedings despite the existence of detailed evidence and the testimony of the victim.

Moreover, it demands explanations for the apparent increase in trafficking in women since the arrival in Kosovo of troops of the KFOR and the involvement of international police in trafficking; requests that the individuals involved be duly prosecuted and convicted;

- Turkey : Parliament notes with concern that domestic violence and other forms of violence against women are still widespread. Therefore, full legal protection, judicial assistance and economic aid to victims is provided. It calls for the discontinuation of the practice of reducing sentences in cases of "honour crimes" on grounds of customs and tradition. Lastly, it considers forced marriages - still performed in Turkey - as a violation of fundamental rights and a form of violence against women and calls upon Turkey to strive to stop this widespread practice.