

Dear Secretary General,
Dear Ambassadors,
Dear members of Gender Equality Commission,

Albanian authorities attach great importance to the promotion of Gender Equality and to the elimination of violence against women. This is reflected in the inclusion on both topics within the priorities identified for our Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

The Council of Europe can be proud of the standards it has set in the field of Gender Equality. Most Recommendations adopted by the Committee of Ministers have had a measurable impact, becoming the key reference document for changes in legislations and policies at national level, both in Europe and beyond. All the recommendations adopted by the Committee of Ministers have been collected together in a compilation entitled "Make equality in law a reality in fact",^[1] a source of inspiration for all those wishing to promote gender equality as an essential precondition for protecting human rights and achieving genuine democracy. Two outstanding conventions have also emerged from the Council of Europe's work in the field of gender equality: the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. These are two Conventions that my government supports wholeheartly.

The Committee of Ministers shares the Secretary General's vision for the reform of the Organisation which implies focusing further on implementation of existing standards and adapting our working methods to the evolving needs of our member States. This is particularly much needed and much expected In the field of gender equality.

In its Declaration "Making gender equality a reality", adopted in Madrid in 2009, the Committee of Ministers urged member states to commit themselves fully to bridging the gap between equality in fact and in law . This was also the call of the Ministers of the States participating in the last Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Equality between Women and Men (Baku, 2010).

My government therefore fully supports the timely launching of a transversal programme on gender equality as suggested by the Secretary General. Albania has already in place a revised strategy for equal opportunities and against discrimination 2010- 2015. Albanian government among top priorities has put economic empowerment of women as a basic element for women participation in public and social life. Albania is also among first countries to sign the European convention against any form of discrimination(Istanbul Convention), and actually is in the process of costing as a

preparatory process to its ratification.

I believe that the work of the Commission of Gender Equality will bust further the process and progress of equal opportunities throughout Europe and further.

The new Gender Equality Commission (this Commission) is expected to play a key role in helping our Organisation to assess the needs and identify the best ways to remove the obstacles to implementation of its standards in the field of gender equality. Your advice will be particularly relevant also in the context of a mainstreaming effort which will aim at incorporating the gender equality dimension in all decisions and measures taken by our Organisation. I trust that your work will also inspire and facilitate progress in other regions of the world, in particular thanks to co-operation with UN-Women and the EU. Not surprinsignly, the promotion of women's rights and the elimination of violence against women are amongst the main topics addressed through co-operation with our neighbouring countries.

As deputy minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities I am fully aware of the difficulties that many of you may face when trying to push the Gender Equality agenda in your respective capitals. This is all the more difficult in the current economic context, but the new transversal Programme and this Commission should precisely help all member states in their efforts at national level.

I wish you a very succesful meeting and, what is much more important, a very succesful mandate.

Mrs Filloreta Kodra
Deputy minister, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and equal Opportunities,
Albania

6 June 2012