



## EUROPEAN UNION

Delegation of the European Union to the Council of Europe

**The representative to the Council of Europe and Head of the Delegation**

Strasbourg, 30 April 2014

D171/2014

Subject: Intervention of the Deputy to the Head of the Delegation before the Gender Equality Commission (Strasbourg, 2-4 April 2014)

### **The promotion of Gender equality in the European Union (updated March 2014)**

(European Commission, Contact person : Frédérique Fastré, COM DG Justice, Gender equality unit)

#### **I. Background information**

- Equality between women and men is a **fundamental right and a common value** of the EU. The EU is bound to strive for equality between women and men since 1957. With the entry into force of the new Treaty of the European Union at end of 2009, equality between women and men has been upgraded to the status of a "fundamental value" (**art. 2 TUE**) and an objective (**art. 3 TUE**) of the European Union.
- **Article 8 TFEU** requires that the Union promote equality between women and men "in all its activities". All EU institutions are required to aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality between men and women in all activities.
- Moreover, the EU's **Charter of Fundamental Rights** provides for equality between women and men and prohibits sex discrimination in all fields.
- From 1975, the EU has issued **several directives** on sex discrimination and the European Court of Justice has given a great number of judgments on sex discrimination cases.
- The European Commission strengthened its commitment to gender equality and gender mainstreaming in all EU policies and adopted in 2010 the **Women's Charter** and the **Commission's Strategy for equality between women and men**.
- The Strategy for equality between women and men for the period 2010-2015 was adopted in September 2010 and reflects the European Commission's commitment to continue and step up its activities in the field of gender equality. The Strategy is accompanied by a Staff Working Document listing the actions to be implemented between 2010 and 2015 by each Directorate-General of the Commission. It stipulates that each Directorate-General is responsible for the programming, monitoring and reporting of the gender equality activities in its policy fields.
- The Strategy reaffirms the dual approach of gender mainstreaming and the adoption of specific measures **in six priority areas**:
  - equal economic independence for women and men;
  - equal pay for work of equal value;
  - equality in decision-making;
  - dignity, integrity and ending gender violence;

- promoting gender equality beyond the EU;
- horizontal issues, in particular combating rigid gender roles and promoting the role of men

## II. Achievements and current activities

- Every year, in its **annual report on progress on equality between women and men**, the Commission provides a detailed assessment of the progress being made with regard to equality between women and men in Europe across the priority areas of the Strategy. The annual reports take stock of the main policy developments and analyse progress achieved using a robust set of indicators. **The next annual report is scheduled to be adopted in April 2014.**

### 1. Equal pay

- The European Commission organised the fourth **European Equal Pay Day (EPPD)** on **28 February 2014**. This day is held each year to increase awareness of the fact that women need to work longer than men to earn the same. Activities related to this day included a press release and the update of a new brochure with information, national good practices and the latest data on GPG<sup>1</sup>.
- **"Equality Pays Off" project<sup>2</sup>**: a Commission's project called "Equality Pays Off" took place in 2012 and 2013. Its aim was to support employers in their efforts to tackle the gender pay gap by raising awareness of the "business case" for gender equality and equal pay through better access to the labour force potential of women in a context of demographic changes and skill shortages. Workshops, trainings and materials were produced for the companies.
- **Exchange of good practices on national equal pay days**: An exchange of good practices took place in Estonia on 18-19 June 2013 on equal pay days. Estonia, Belgium and Spain presented their respective equal pay days. During the exchange, participants discussed and proposed ideas on how to improve the impact of the equal pay days in general by raising awareness of the existence of the GPG and how to improve the collaboration between the different players in the organisation of these equal pay days.
- **Open call for proposals**: In 2013 the Commission published an open call for proposals on "Support to civil society and other stakeholders aiming at promoting equality between women and men". One of the two concrete priority areas of this call is addressing the gender pay gap. The Commission is finishing the evaluation process.
- **Report on the application of Directive 2006/54/EC<sup>3</sup>**: In December 2013, the Commission published a report on the application of the Directive 2006/54/EC. This report focusses in particular on assessing the application of the provisions on equal pay in practice. It includes an overview of the landmark EU case-law on equal pay. It also includes a section on job classification schemes and examples of national actions.
- **Recommendation on wage transparency<sup>4</sup>**: In March 2014, the Commission published a recommendation focusing on pay transparency. The recommendation aims to propose measures for the Member States to facilitate wage transparency in companies, such as improving the conditions for employees to obtain information on

<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/gender\\_pay\\_gap/140227\\_gpg\\_brochure\\_web\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/gender_pay_gap/140227_gpg_brochure_web_en.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/equality-pays-off/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/equality-pays-off/index_en.htm)

<sup>3</sup> COM (2013) 861 final: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-pay-gap/131209\\_directive\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-pay-gap/131209_directive_en.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> COM (2014) 1405 final: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/gender\\_pay\\_gap/c\\_2014\\_1405\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/gender_pay_gap/c_2014_1405_en.pdf)

pay or the establishment of pay reporting and gender neutral job classification systems from companies, among others.

## 2. Combating violence against women (VAW)

- In 2013, the Commission co-funded **13 national project developing awareness-raising activities on violence against women** through the PROGRESS program.
- **Ending female genital mutilation** is among the main priorities of the Commission.
- The Commission launched a social media campaign on "Zero tolerance of FGM" in March 2013 as well as a public consultation on FGM.
- The Commission and the European External Action Services adopted a **Communication on eliminating female genital mutilation on 25 November 2013**.

## 3. Gender balance in decision-making

- **Proposal for a Directive on improving gender balance among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges**

### **State of play**

On 20 November 2013, the European Parliament voted with a strong majority to back the proposed Directive and confirmed the broad consensus to increase gender balance on corporate boards and general endorsement of the European Commission's approach. The proposal is currently being discussed by the Council of the EU. The Commission proposal is being discussed by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU.

## 4. Participation of the EU to the 58th session of the Commission on the Status of Women

The 58th session of the Commission on the Status of Women took place from 10 to 21 March. Agreed Conclusions on the priority theme **Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls** were agreed after intense rounds of negotiations. The added values of these Agreed Conclusions lies in the narrative of identifying the gaps from the MDGs and setting the stage with a call for a stand-alone goal and mainstreaming of gender issues in the future post-2015 framework. Four resolutions **Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women; Release of women and children taken hostage, including those subsequently imprisoned, in armed conflicts; Gender equality and empowerment of women in natural disasters and Women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS** were adopted at the end of the session. EU Coordination proceeded smoothly throughout, based on an agreed EU position paper with a joint position on all matters, including sexual health and reproductive rights. The EU also organized **three side events** and regularly briefed NGOs on the ongoing negotiations.

The theme for 2015 will be the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, including current challenges that affect the implementation of the Platform for Action and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women, as well as opportunities for strengthening gender equality and the empowerment of women in the post-2015 development agenda through the integration of a gender perspective.

*More information are available at this link: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/index_en.htm)*