



# EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

## Equality rules

The economic crisis must not derail progress on women's rights, writes **Susana Elisa Pavlou**

**T**he Cyprus women's lobby (CWL) is a network of 16 women's organisations and NGOs throughout Cyprus working on a range of issues including sexual and reproductive rights, violence against women including trafficking, women's economic empowerment and the rights of migrant women, among others. Our mission is to promote the empowerment of women in all their diversity to advance gender equality, combat all forms of discrimination and violence against women, and to ensure full access for all women to their human rights through their active involvement in society, and in policy development and implementation.

The CWL became a full member of the European women's lobby (EWL) in 2008. The EWL is the largest umbrella organisation of women's associations in the European Union aimed at promoting women's rights and equality between women and men. The EWL works primarily with EU institutions and has a direct impact on gender equality policy on a European level.

Under the Cyprus presidency, which began last week, CWL member organisations have been closely monitoring gender equality developments on a national and EU level and lobbying relevant stakeholders to ensure that women's rights are at the core of the Cyprus presidency programme.

In the current economic climate, it is ever more important to strengthen our efforts towards gender equality. Both at the European and the national level we witness how the crisis is used to cut funding for women's rights and gender equality-related activities and institutions, and how these issues are losing visibility and focus. These cuts also threaten the very existence of women's organisations. This trend not only risks

jeopardising recent progress, it also risks creating serious backlashes regarding, for example, the support and prevention of violence against women, the promotion of women's economic independence or the fight against negative gender stereotypes.

Of particular concern to women's organisations and NGOs across Europe is the current proposal to merge gender equality funding instruments under the new financial framework 2014-2020. For this reason, we are urging Nicosia to take steps to ensure there is no degradation in the level and predictability of EU funding for activities on women's rights and gender equality, including combating violence against women.

The Cyprus women's lobby was very pleased to see the issue of violence against women as a core priority of the Cyprus presidency. The EWL and its member organisations have for years been calling on European institutions to initiate concrete action at European level to end male violence against women as the main obstacle to gender equality. Despite this, political responses and resources have been piecemeal, unequal and inadequate both at national and European level. The Cyprus presidency will be issuing council conclusions on violence against women to be adopted by the employment, social policy, health and consumer affairs council. Within this framework we urge the Cyprus presidency to request, in particular, an EU strategy to end violence against women encompassing a comprehensive European action on eradicating all forms of male violence against women in the EU; to declare 2015 to be the European year to end violence against women; and for the EU and its member states to become party to the council of Europe convention on violence against women.

The undertaking of the presidency of the council is a major opportunity for Cyprus and we expect it to provide progressive and ambitious leadership in relation to issues related to women's human rights, in particular the fight against all forms of male violence against women. ★



Susana Elisa Pavlou is director of the Mediterranean institute of gender studies