

OPEN LETTER

Dear Vice President Timmermans,

We are writing to you today to confirm your active support for both the promised EU LGBTI strategy and the EU Strategy for Equality between Women and Men. Commissioner Jourova has publically committed on several occasions in front of the European Parliament to advancing both these important and complimentary strategies. We are aware that the College of Commissioners will very soon make a decision on which initiatives to pursue in 2015. It would send a very bad signal to citizens of Europe and to stakeholders concerned about women's rights and LGBTI rights, if the European Commission decided to drop both strategies from the list of initiatives put forward for 2015.

We are fully aware that in the current context of the Commission, there is a desire to be strategic in terms of the types of policies proposed by the EU. While this approach is undeniably reasonable and practical, we urge you not to forget the responsibility of the European Commission to uphold and advance equality and combat discrimination. Targeted action is needed to ensure concrete outcomes and show Europe's commitment to deliver change.

Equality between women and men is a fundamental value of the EU (article 2 TUE), enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights (article 23); the EU has the responsibility to promote equality between women and men (article 3 TUE and article 8 TFUE). Recent analyses of the EU's delivery against these commitments on the 20th Anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action by the European Women's Lobby, by EIGE and by the European Parliament, clearly show that the EU is falling well short of its political responsibility of achieving equality between women and men. UN member states just adopted the CSW political declaration which reaffirms their commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action. The Beijing Platform for Action stresses on separate and strong institutional mechanisms for women's rights: the EC has to follow this requirement and have a dedicated instrument for equality between women and men.

Additionally, it is essential at this time that the EU is unequivocal and clear about its commitment to putting an end to the discrimination that LGBTI people continue to face within the EU's borders. The Fundamental Rights Agency Survey on LGBT rights (2013) clearly highlights the discrimination, bullying and violence experienced by LGBTI people on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity in Europe. An EU LGBTI strategy, fully in line with the EU's competences, would not add new policy initiatives or legislative proposals. In addition to demonstrating strong political commitment, it would increase coherence, clarity and visibility for all the activities currently being done at EU level. We have been heartened by the EU's focus on LGBTI rights in recent years but there is no time for complacency.

Grassroots LGBTI and women's organisations that make up our membership in Europe are reporting increased threats to their political space, including physical attacks on their persons and property. At such a time, it is essential that the European Commission shows political leadership by giving visibility and support through clearly setting out its own strategies to support women's and girls' rights and LGBTI rights. We want to see the EC taking stock of the demands and resolutions of the EP, in recent years on equality between women and men and on LGBTI rights. The adoption of twin strategies for equality between women and men

and on LGBTI rights is the only way to ensure that this happens in a transparent and accountable way.

As you know, we welcome the appointment of a Commissioner for gender equality, but without a strategy on equality between women and men, the Commissioner will have very little means to deliver its work; it's a question of credibility and accountability for the EC.

The EU needs to ensure coherence in its internal and external actions and champion women's rights and LGBTI rights in its internal policies, as it is already doing externally.

The European Commission, at the beginning of its new term of office, is in a position to make a visible difference by providing two strategies as simple and tangible tools for the European Commission to show citizens exactly what the European Commission is doing to address their concerns.

Yours sincerely,



Evelyne Paradis

Executive Director, ILGA-Europe



Joanna Maycock

Secretary-General, European Women's Lobby