



LOBBY EUROPEEN DES FEMMES EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LOBBY

Brussels, 27 June 2008

Dear President Barroso,

Re: Upcoming new European anti-discrimination legislation

The European Women's Lobby (EWL) welcomes the announcement made during your meeting on the 12th of June with the delegation from the Platform of European Social NGOs that the European Commission will propose a single anti-discrimination directive offering protection from discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, religion/belief and sexual orientation in all areas of life.

The EWL, which represents thousands of women's organisations across the European Union supports the call for a new and comprehensive anti-discrimination directive, since we strongly believe that there should be no hierarchy of rights between the different grounds of discrimination. **Regarding the future directive, we would like to especially stress that a gender perspective should be mainstreamed and that the issue of multiple discrimination should be tackled.**

We would also like to take this opportunity to remind you that the commitment you made in 2004 was to initiate new legislation on the basis of Article 13 of EC Treaty, to ensure protection to all forms of discrimination, including gender: "*With a framework-directive, the community action will cover all areas of discrimination and also discrimination founded inter alia on gender and sexual orientation*"¹. Yet, we haven't heard of any new European initiative planned to combat sex-based discrimination. While the European gender equality legislation covers employment and goods and services, large gaps still exist in relation to the material scope of European gender equality legislation, which might even widen if new legislation is adopted covering age, disability, religion/belief and sexual orientation. The EWL has for a long time stressed the need to level-up the gender-equality legislation to ensure a uniform protection for all grounds of discrimination² and **our members across Europe are worried about a possible situation whereby gender will be least protected ground of discrimination.**

As you can see in the attached table showing the scope of European anti-discrimination legislation for all Article 13 grounds, there exist important shortcomings in the material scope of the gender equality legislation (for example on health, media and education). The EWL is very concerned about this situation, but also about that fact that media and political discourses in the last weeks have been

¹ Speech to the European Parliament, European Parliament Plenary Session, Strasbourg, 26 October 2004 (SPEECH/04/474)

² We attached for your information in annex 2 EWL Response on 15.10.2007 to the EC consultation on a possible new initiative to prevent and combat discrimination outside employment.

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spreading the misleading and false assumption that sex-based discrimination is fully protected under EU legislation while this is far from being the case.

Knowing your personal commitment to gender equality and given that the promotion of equality between women and men is a mission of the European Union, we would therefore like to ask you what initiatives the European Commission is planning to undertake regarding gender equality legislation in the future to ensure that there will not be any hierarchy of rights between gender equality legislation and anti—discrimination legislation.

I remain at your disposal should you require any further information.

Sincerely yours,

Myria Vassiliadou
General Secretary of the European Women's Lobby

Cc: Commissioner Špidla