



EUROPEAN WOMEN'S
LOBBY
EUROPEEN DES FEMMES

STATEMENT

Brussels, 16 March 2011

EWL STATEMENT ON THE EUROPEAN PACT FOR GENDER EQUALITY 2011-2020 ADOPTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, MARCH 7 2011

Introduction

The European Women's Lobby (EWL), the largest coalition of women's organisations in the European Union, has been highlighting the need for the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015 and the Europe 2020 Strategy to be accompanied by a strong instrument agreed by Member States and therefore welcomes the new European Pact for Gender Equality. Such a coordination tool between the European Commission and the Council, between the European and the national level, and finally between general socio-economic instruments and women's rights specific instruments, is the most effective option to ensure policy coordination and a positive impact of the different instruments on all women living in Europe.

The EWL welcomes the renewed commitment of the Member States to the fulfilment of the EU Treaty ambitions in relation to equality between women and men and in particular the strong language that is used, in relation to 'eliminating' gender stereotypes, 'closing' gender gaps in employment, promoting the 'equal' participation of women and men in decision-making and 'combating' all forms of violence against women. However, the EWL regrets that no binding concrete measures, including targets, are foreseen in the Pact, except the renewed commitment to the Barcelona childcare objectives.

Finally, the Council in the Pact states that gender equality policies are 'vital to economic growth, prosperity and competitiveness'. This has led to a narrowed down approach to women's rights and gender equality in the economic area, where the main focus is to increase women's employment in quantitative terms.¹ More generally, the EWL regrets that the issue of equality between women and men is approached through this predominantly economic perspective, which is of course important, but this issue is therefore not put in the framework of human rights, which are at the core of European values, aiming at reaching equality between women and men and guaranteeing women's rights and human rights for all, ensuring dignity, democracy justice and integrity.

EWL comments related to governance, implementation and monitoring of the Pact

The EWL welcomes the commitment to the reinforcement of the gender mainstreaming strategy in the Pact but would like to stress that gender mainstreaming necessitates real political will, planning and resources (expertise, training, knowledge) in order to be truly transformative. The aim of gender mainstreaming is to transform policies, in order for all policies to address the needs and situation of both women and men and subsequently, to contribute to equality between women and men. In addition to this, gender mainstreaming alone is not sufficient to address structural discrimination against women and gender inequalities; a dual approach of gender mainstreaming, including the introduction and implementation of gender budgeting, and specific measures to compensate for and eliminate inequalities between women and men is needed, as foreseen notably in the European Commission Strategy for the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015.

¹ The EWL has produced on 7 March 2011 a contribution on the EU 20/20 Strategy: 'Economic policy governance without a women's rights' perspective undermines the inclusive objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy', see: <http://www.womenlobby.org/spip.php?article1259&lang=en>



The European Women's Lobby also welcomes the requests made in the Gender Pact to integrate gender equality in the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy, i.e. the request for the Commission and the Council to incorporate gender equality in the Annual Growth Survey and Country Opinions and Country Specific Recommendations, and for the Member States to promote gender equality policies and apply a gender equality perspective in National Reform Programmes. If these recommendations are carefully implemented by all concerned parties, they have the potential for the Europe 2020 Strategy to have a positive impact on women by bringing gender equality at the heart of policy coordination between the EU and the Member States. The EWL also reminds that a gender equality perspective must be integrated into macro-and microeconomic policies that often undermine women's labour market access and economic independence so the reference to the Annual Growth Survey is a positive step.

These commitments must be put into practice immediately. The EWL expects to see a strong gender equality perspective in the National Reform Programmes that are to be finalized in April, including the introduction by Member States of concrete proposals in all the fields mentioned by the Pact, such as targets to eliminate gender pay gap and to increase care services for children and other dependants.

The EWL also regrets that some issues are completely absent from the Gender Pact, despite the commitment of the EU and its Member States to gender mainstreaming (implying that gender equality should concern all policy areas) and to the UN Beijing Platform for Action, which includes 12 areas of action. It is regrettable that issues of social protection and notably pensions, health, human rights, media or environment are not mentioned at all and that questions related to education or external policy are mentioned in a very vague way.

Finally, the EWL hopes that mechanisms will be put in place, in order to ensure monitoring of progress and evaluation of the implementation of the Gender Pact, which could include an annual report by each Member State to the Spring Summit concerning the fulfilment of the objectives of the Pact and the full integration of women's situation and of a gender equality perspective in the governing and monitoring mechanisms of the EU 2020 strategy at the national and European level.

The EWL highlights in the following pages specific comments about the different measures foreseen in the Pact.

EWL comments on 'Measures to close gender gaps and combat gender segregation in the labour market'

Generally speaking, the proposals of the Pact in relation to the labour market address some of the main issues in relation to gender inequality at work. However, the Pact doesn't propose any concrete new measure to fill the existing gaps. In order to concretely improve the situation, new specific targets should have been introduced regarding the gender pay gap, the gender pension gap, the share of parental leave and of part-time taken by men or the representation of women in boards.

Secondly, while the Pact encourages Member States to promote women's employment, it does not sufficiently address the lower quality of women's employment and its consequences for women's economic independence. In addition, the Pact doesn't address the fact that some groups of women (apart from age issues) face more discrimination on the labour market, for example single mothers, women with disabilities, or migrant women.

In relation to the gender pay gap, the approach is quite minimal: the reasons for women's lower income are not addressed and their long term consequences in terms of the gender pension gap and higher at-risk of poverty of



older women are not mentioned. The EWL recalls its recommendation on the introduction of a new target on equal pay, whereby each Member State would commit to reduce their gender pay gap by 10 points by 2020.

Thirdly, although under the first heading of the Pact the Council commits to closing gender gaps in social protection and to reducing poverty, the measures proposed do not address these commitments. The EWL considers this as a serious omission. Women's situation in Europe is getting worse because of the impact of the crisis and of subsequent austerity measures. Further cuts in State expenditure as recommended in the policy guidance given by the Commission for the implementation of the 2020 Strategy risk aggravating this impact. The Council should have therefore asked Member States to take concrete measures to improve social security and pensions systems so as to eliminate gender inequalities in their functioning (notably to eliminate the gender pensions gap and ensure the individualization of rights to social security and social benefits) and to make them better address women's working and life patterns, (for example through counting time spent out from labour market in caring or life-long learning as pension time).

As the reduction of poverty is one of the targets of the 2020 Strategy and given the fact that women are the majority in all groups experiencing poverty, it is regrettable that the Council did not include in the Pact any concrete measure to address the feminization of poverty at national level, through improvements in social protection systems, but also through other means such as the introduction of a minimum income and of poverty indicators based on an individual and not household basis.

Finally, the EWL regrets that no concrete commitment is made in the Pact in relation to women in entrepreneurship and in decision-making. Quotas or parity systems are being introduced in different countries for the private and political sector, which are very welcome. The Council should therefore have shown more vision and a stronger commitment to parity and democracy. The EWL hopes that concrete monitoring and benchmarking at Council level area will still allow for positive results.

EWL comments on 'Measures to promote better work-life balance for women and men'

The EWL welcomes the focus on better work-life balance for women and men, as this aspect impacts on many other issues related to equality between women and men. It is positive that the Barcelona childcare targets are reaffirmed, but given that the Pact is designed for a period of 10 years these targets should have been increased, for example to provide childcare care for at least 50% of children under 3 years old and 100% of children in the age bracket 3 to 6 years old. While it is positive that the Pact urges Member States to improve the provision of care facilities for other dependants, in view of the increasing number of elderly people in need for care, an additional step could have been to introduce a new target concerning care services for other dependants.

The EU is still a place where the cost of bearing a child is mainly shouldered by women and not considered as an investment of the society, and where too many women still have to choose between having children or a career: women's employment rates drop by more than 12% when they have children. The EWL reiterates its call for the Council to implement its commitment to promote work-life balance for women and men by adopting the Maternity directive as adopted by the European Parliament by a large majority on 20.10.2010, which substantially increase European minimum standards for maternity and paternity leave provisions, including an increase of maternity leave provisions from 14 weeks to 20 weeks improved protection against discrimination and the introduction of two weeks leave for new fathers, both fully paid.

EWL comments on 'Measures to tackle all forms of violence against women'



The EWL welcomes the inclusion of the issue of violence against women in the Gender Pact, especially as it was not addressed in the previous Pact. While the Pact refers to different Council Conclusions on gender equality, it forgets to recall the Council Conclusions of 8 March 2010 on the Eradication of violence against women in the EU, which call on the European Commission to *'devise a European Strategy for preventing and combating violence against women by establishing a general framework of common principles and appropriate instruments'* and to *'consider additional legal instruments aimed at eradicating violence against women.'* They should therefore also guide the work of the European Council and of Member States when addressing current challenges in the field of equality between women and men.

Violence against women has devastating impacts on society: it is estimated that the total annual cost of domestic violence in the 27 Member States could be as high as 16 billion Euros, amounting to 1 million Euros every half hour,² whereas the annual budgets of EU Member States for prevention programmes of male violence are 1000 times less. Seven women die every day in the EU from male domestic violence;³ between 40 and 50% of women in the European Union report some form of sexual harassment in the workplace.⁴

The EWL would like to recall that reaching a Europe free from violence against women shouldn't be an economic goal only, and has to do with the EU commitment to promote human rights in the world.

The EWL welcomes the intention of the Council to address all forms of violence against women, therefore taking stock of the international commitments of all EU Member States, in particular the UN Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the General Recommendation No. 19 of the CEDAW Committee.⁵ Similarly the Beijing Platform for Action states that *'violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women's full advancement'*. The Gender Pact should not only set the combat against violence against women as a priority, but also ensure that this priority is mainstreamed in all policies areas at national and EU levels; this is what the Women's Charter provides for when asking all Commissioners to put the respect for fundamental rights at the core of their activities. The Gender Pact is an opportunity for Council members to reiterate such commitment.

The EWL welcomes the acknowledgement of the need to tackle violence against women at both national and European level, implying that each Member State has to commit to develop stronger and more comprehensive policies. Such policies should comprise a wide range of activities and legislation; this should comprise action in all fields: Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, service Provision, and Partnership. Prevention and protection are very important aspects of such policies, but should be complemented with prosecution measures, in order to end impunity of perpetrators, which is incompatible with the EU principle of equality between women and men and EU goal of social cohesion and social justice. Service provision is an essential aspect of such policies, in order to provide all women, including women from disadvantaged groups, with the best services throughout Europe; such provision should be sustainably funded in order to provide long-term and consistent help and support and should aim at ensuring the full enjoyment by women of their human rights. Measures to emphasise the role and responsibility of men and boys are welcome and should be complementary to support to women and girls victims and survivors of violence against women.

² Psytel, 2006 Daphne Project on the cost of domestic violence in Europe

³ Psytel, 2007 Daphne Project on the evaluation of mortality linked to domestic violence in Europe

⁴ EC, 1998

⁵ The Recommendation states that *'Gender-based violence against women is violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately, and includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty'*.