

DECLARATION

NCEO – Network of Parliamentary Committees for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the European Union

15th Conference – Brussels, 22 November 2010

CONFERENCE CONCLUSIONS

Declaration of Brussels to improve the representation of women in senior positions

We, elected representatives of National Parliaments of the Member States and Candidate Countries and of the European Parliament attending the 15th Conference of the Network of Parliamentary Committees for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, in Brussels, note that:

§ 1. women, despite their high qualification, are still greatly under-represented in managerial positions, as clearly emerges from the numerical data in the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015 of the European Commission (Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Brussels, 21 September 2010, COM (2010) 491).

On average, only one in four parliament members and ministers in the EU is a woman. In the business world, the presence of women in high positions lies below any acceptable level; only one in ten board members of the largest listed companies in the EU and 3% of board chairs are women. In the area of female entrepreneurship, female entrepreneurs make up about 33% of the total number of entrepreneurs in the EU. Women come up against the so-called “glass ceiling”: the movement of women to decision-making levels seems to be in one way or another impeded. Within the public sector the participation of woman in managerial positions is somewhat greater than in the private sector, but there is still no question of real gender equality, even though the government has an exemplary role.

§ 2. that there nonetheless exists a broad international consensus on the need for more women in managerial positions, not only because this is a matter of fundamental equality, but also because mixed decision-making bodies are more efficient and adopt a broader vision, and because women make up half of society’s potential; this talent should not be absent from decision-making bodies as well.

Equality of men and women is a matter of fundamental human rights. The convention on elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW convention, 1979) as well as Article 8 of the

Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (consolidated version after the entry into effect of the Treaty of Lisbon, previous Article 3, paragraph 2, VEG) that explicitly specifies that the European Union strives at every occasion to abolish the inequalities between men and women and to promote equality of men and women, commit the EU and all the member states. In the meantime, various EU member states have also incorporated equality between men and women expressly into their national constitutions.

The underutilisation of female talent is damaging to the continuing economic and social development of the European Union and its member states, especially in the light of the Europa 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The Commission has set five measurable EU targets for 2020: employment, research and innovation, climate and energy objectives, education and elimination of poverty. These targets can never be attained without greater participation of women in the labour market and in decision-making. The recent financial and economic crisis and the great appetite for risk of financial institutions have made the debate on greater representation of women in financial and economic decision-making more necessary than ever.

§ 3. that women are also still confronted with a number of obstacles to moving into managerial positions. The combination of family and work still forms an obstacle for many women. Various family-friendly measures can make transition toward a managerial position more attainable for women. Prejudices and stereotypes with regard to female managers persist. Women still do not get the respect and confidence that they deserve.

§ 4. a long road has already been travelled toward equality between men and women in which specific policy measures have been critical.

Guidelines in that area are the Declaration and Platform for Action connected with the Fourth World Conference on Women of the United Nations in Beijing in 1995, and the subsequent proceedings in which the countries committed themselves to undertake action to implement equality between men and women. Art. 192 of the Platform for Action states that Governments, national bodies, the private sector, political parties, trade unions, employers' organisations, research and academic institutions, subregional and regional bodies and non-governmental and international organisations should take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making.

In September 2010, The European Commission launched its Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015, in which equality in decision-making constitutes one of the most important issues of the Commission (Brussels, 21 September 2010, COM (2010) 491).

The EU member states have already taken a number of measures to increase representation of women in decision-making.

In the area of political decision-making, specific measures have ensured a greater presence of women elected to parliaments. Since 1994, legal quotas have been introduced in constitutional and voting rights in five EU member states, namely in Belgium, France, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain. Political parties also introduced voluntary quotas that they observe in drafting lists of candidates.

Various EU member states have taken measures to ensure a guaranteed presence of women in the management boards of public enterprises and/or private businesses. The quota regulation in Norway for the business world has ensured that in the area of economic decision-making a much more balanced situation has developed in the management boards of businesses (42% women on management boards). The Norwegian legislation has inspired other countries, such as Spain, France and the Netherlands, who introduced legal quotas for the management boards of listed companies. Other countries, such as Belgium, have introduced quotas for the management boards of several public business enterprises. Sweden imposes no quotas, but in September 2009 started training programmes to increase the number of women on management boards.

The EU member states also implement a supportive policy with regard to women in decision-making, ranging from research and training programmes to sensitisation campaigns, etc.

Therefore, we, elected representatives of National Parliaments of the Member States and Candidate Countries and of the European Parliament attending the 15th Conference of the Network of Parliamentary Committees for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, in Brussels, declare that:

1. the representation of women in decision-making should be strongly promoted. A global strategy should be developed for this purpose, ranging from collection of information and research, European and national indicators, and sensitisation campaigns to positive action measures in all areas of decision-making. In extending the progress made with regard to political decision-making, the focus should be put on greater participation of women in socio-economic decision-making;

2. government and public business enterprises fulfil an important function as examples to society. Within public business enterprises, legal quotas or target figures are therefore needed to ensure balanced representation of men and women within the governing boards;
3. strong measures are needed to promote balanced representation of men and women in listed companies based on the different policies member states have introduced, going from sensitisation actions to a range of supportive measures, target figures and legal quotas;
4. encouragement of female entrepreneurship should become a policy priority at both the European and national level;
5. greater representation of women should be integrated in labour negotiations at all levels, in both employee and employer organisations;
6. priority should be given to the elimination of the pay gap between men and women;
7. supportive measures are needed to strengthen the position of women in the labour market, such as measures to help plan and support careers, bring about a change in mentality and make possible a balance between work and private life;
8. further statistical and scientific research is necessary on gender aspects in social and economic life.

We, elected representatives of National Parliaments of the Member States and Candidate Countries and of the European Parliament attending the 15th Conference of the Network of Parliamentary Committees for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, in Brussels, commit ourselves to:

- putting these policy recommendations on the agenda in the European Parliament and in the national parliaments;
- advocating the implementation of these policy recommendations in our policy in the European Council, the Commission and the national (or regional) governments;
- consulting with the socially relevant parties within the Union on these policy recommendations;
- using the NCEO network to evaluate these policy recommendations and to exchange 'best practices' within the member states.