

# Council Conclusions - Equality between women and men in the field of decision-making

## NOTING THAT

1. Equality between women and men is a fundamental principle of the European Union enshrined in the Treaties and is one of the objectives and tasks of the European Union, and that mainstreaming the principle of equality between women and men in all its activities represents a specific mission for the Union.
2. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union states that "equality between women and men must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay" and that "the principle of equality shall not prevent the maintenance or adoption of measures providing for specific advantages in favour of the under-represented sex."
3. In its Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015, the European Commission identified equality in decision-making as one of the priority areas for action.
4. In the European Pact for Gender Equality, the Council urged the need for "measures to close gender gaps and combat gender segregation in the labour market," including the promotion of "the equal participation of women and men in decision-making at all levels and in all fields, in order to make full use of all talents."
5. This set of Conclusions builds on previous work and political commitments voiced by the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission and other relevant stakeholders in this area including the documents listed in Annex II.
6. There is still a need to achieve de facto gender equality in the European Union, and that this requires a multi-faceted approach including legislation, awareness-raising to promote attitudinal change and positive action programmes.
7. Women in the EU make up more than half of the population and of the electorate, and they are highly educated—yet women continue to be under-represented in decision-making positions at all levels. Equal participation of women and men in decision-making is a matter of justice, respect for human rights and good governance. Equality between women and men in the field of decision-making is needed to better reflect the composition of society and in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning. It is also likely to benefit the EU's economic growth and competitiveness.
8. At an informal meeting organized by the Luxembourg Presidency on 16-17 July 2015, Ministers of Gender Equality and Employment addressed the topic "Changes in the labour market: a challenge for women and for men." Their exchanges focused on the changing roles of women and men; on leave and flexible work arrangements for women and men; and on stimulating changes in corporate culture. Making workplaces and reconciliation policies more equality-friendly and encouraging the more equal sharing of care responsibilities between women and men can also help to facilitate greater equality in decision-making.
9. The Council has already highlighted the need to increase the representation of women on decision-making bodies, not only in the economic and political fields, but also in areas such as science and research, the media and sport. The Member States and the Commission have taken various measures. There are clear signs that the overall situation is improving in a number of Member States. However, it is nevertheless true that women continue to be under-represented in decision-making positions in all walks of life. The issue of gender balance in decision-making therefore still requires close attention from policy-makers and researchers.
10. One of the critical areas of concern identified in the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) is "Women in Power and Decision-making" (Area G). It includes two strategic objectives, namely, *taking measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making* (G1) and *increasing women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership* (G2). This critical area of concern has been reviewed by the Council in 1999, 2003 and 2008. On the basis of an independent monitoring report by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), entitled "Beijing + 20", in 2014, the Council adopted

Conclusions in which it undertook to tackle the remaining challenges in the field of gender equality, including gender gaps in decision-making. In 2015, the European Union and its Member States renewed their commitment to intensify actions and measures in order to ensure the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

## WELCOMING

11. The Report on the Review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States: Gender Equality in Power and Decision-Making<sup>[1]</sup>, drafted by EIGE at the request of the Luxembourg Presidency, which gives an overview of women's and men's engagement in political, economic and social decision-making in the period from 2003 to 2014. The report also presents examples of initiatives taken by the Member States to promote women's participation, in particular in leadership positions.

12. The report also illustrates general trends in decision-making in certain other areas such as research institutions and academia, the media, and sports organisations, where comparable data are available.

## NOTING THAT

13. EIGE's report clearly illustrates the encouraging progress that has been made in recent years, even if the situation varies considerably between Member States. In particular, there has been a discernible increase in women's share of top leadership positions in legislative and executive political institutions and in public administration. A slight improvement has also been seen in workers' and employers' organisations at both national and European level. In the economic sphere, the representation of women within the highest decision-making bodies in the largest publicly listed companies has also gradually increased, the most significant improvement being found in countries that have taken legislative measures in this area. On the other hand, in the financial sector, the rate of improvement has been much slower.

14. As regards the field of academia and research, EIGE's report shows that women remain a minority at the top of the decision-making hierarchy, although the situation overall is beginning to improve. In media organisations, the share of women in decision-making positions decreases in direct proportion to the level of seniority. The same applies to the sports sector where the representation of women in top decision-making positions in relevant organisations within the Member States and at the European level remains very low.

15. The under-representation of women in decision-making is a very broad and multifaceted issue that needs to be placed in the context of a number of policy efforts aimed at improving gender equality, including policies to increase the employment rate of women, to reduce the gender pay gap, to tackle gender segregation in education and employment and to tackle untransparent nomination and promotion schemes. Moreover, it is necessary in this context to promote family-friendly policies, to support a more equal distribution of caring and domestic responsibilities between women and men, to improve the reconciliation of work, family and private life, and to overcome gender stereotypes and challenge stereotypical assumptions about the roles of women and men.

16. EIGE's report builds on data based on the 18 indicators on political and economic decision-making that were endorsed by the Council in 1999, 2003 and 2008, and that in its report, EIGE has suggested a number of changes to the existing indicators<sup>[2]</sup> and proposed additional indicators on

*political party leadership*

*leadership in the corporate sector*

and

*policies*

17. **TAKING NOTE OF** the following three

*new indicators*

developed by EIGE for measuring the gender balance in decision-making:

**Indicator 7:** The proportion of women and men among the leaders and deputy leaders of major political parties in Member States.

**Indicator 19:** The proportion and number of women and men among executive and non-executive members<sup>[3]</sup> of the two highest decision-making bodies of the largest nationally registered companies listed on the national stock-exchange.

**Indicator 20:** Policies to promote gender-balanced participation in economic decision-making.

## The Council of the European Union calls on the member states and the Commission, in accordance with their respective competences, to:

18. Continue to monitor the critical area of concern "Women in Power and Decision-making" (Area G) by using the indicators as set out in Annex I, including

*two<sup>[4]</sup>*

of the new indicators developed by EIGE, and by further developing and improving these indicators, making full use of the work of EIGE and Eurostat.

19. Improve the collection, the analysis and the dissemination at both national and EU level of comprehensive, comparable and reliable and regularly updated data on the subject of equality between women and men in the field of decision-making, working in cooperation with EU and national statistical offices and making full use of the work of EIGE, paying particular attention to fields where there is a shortage of harmonised and comparable data, as is the case in research, the media and sports.

20. Promote further research on matters related to this area of concern, including on effective measures to eliminate the gender gaps in decision-making, as well as research into women's participation in decision-making in research, the media, and sports, as well as in the social and voluntary sector (including NGOs and charities), making full use of the work of EIGE.

21. Regularly review progress achieved on those critical areas of concern identified in the Beijing Platform for Action for which indicators have already been developed, to take the outcome of these reviews into account in the Commission's annual Report on Progress on Equality between Women and Men, and, where appropriate, to draw up indicators for the critical areas of concern for which none have yet been developed, making full use of the work of EIGE and Eurostat.

22. Step up efforts to promote the equal representation of women and men in decision-making by pursuing a dual approach that combines gender mainstreaming and specific actions.. Adopt, maintain and enhance targeted measures to increase the representation of women in decision-making in the political and economic sphere, and in other areas such as academia, science, research institutions, the media and sports.

24. Consider a broad range of different measures, legislative and/or non-legislative, voluntary or binding, as well as the exchange of good practice, with a view to improving the gender balance in decision-making bodies in all areas.

25. To combat gender stereotypes in all relevant policy areas, including by means of awareness-raising campaigns, educational measures and, where necessary, positive action, and encourage media professionals to challenge stereotypical assumptions about the roles of women and men, including in leadership positions and caring and domestic responsibilities.

26. Take measures, as appropriate, to eliminate individual, organisational and social obstacles that result in women's decisions not to enter politics or seek the highest decision-making positions in companies and other public and private organisations.

27. Take appropriate measures to encourage a more equal sharing of care and household responsibilities between women and men and accelerate progress in improving the reconciliation of work, family and private life including with the aim of allowing women and men to participate on equal terms in the labour market, politics and other walks of life, as well as with the aim of ensuring that career interruptions resulting from the need to undertake care responsibilities do not prevent women and men with children or other dependants from progressing to senior positions. Ensuring the availability of accessible, affordable and quality childcare and care services for dependants is essential in this respect.

28. Support public debate on gender balance in decision-making and enhance capacity-building measures such as mentoring, sponsoring, media training and awareness-raising, and stimulate the exchange of good practice.

29. Promote institutional and cultural change in companies and private and public organisations so as to ensure that women and men enjoy equal opportunities to advance into decision-making positions at all levels.

30. Support programmes aimed at improving the gender balance in decision-making initiated in different spheres by NGOs, the social partners and all other stakeholders working for gender equality.

## **CALLS ON:**

31. Member States to recognise the benefits of pursuing a balanced representation<sup>[5]</sup> of women and men in political decision-making and thus to encourage the setting of ambitious targets and timelines in accordance with national circumstances, while respecting the role of political parties.

32. The European Commission, governments, political parties and the European and national parliaments to promote a balanced representation of women and men in the political sphere, paying attention, most notably, to their positioning on party lists, for example by introducing a "zipper" system where male and female candidates would appear alternately on such lists, including with a view to the European Parliament elections in 2019, the nomination of a new European Commission in 2019, and nominations to high-level positions in the EU Institutions.

33. Governments and the social partners, while fully respecting their autonomy, as well as companies in the private and public sectors, to establish far-reaching equal opportunities policies and set targets and timelines to further develop and implement effective measures aiming at ensuring the balanced representation of women and men in decision-making and leadership, including training, mentoring and sponsoring schemes and other initiatives.

34. Public and private companies and other organisations to pursue a more equality-friendly corporate culture, including flexible working arrangements and transparency in recruitment and promotion practices, and to encourage the involvement of top management in these efforts.

## INVITES THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION to:

35. Adopt, as a Communication, a new Strategy for gender equality after 2015, which should be closely linked to the Europe 2020 Strategy and which should also take into account the United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.
36. Address equality in decision-making in the above Strategy and in its annual reports on equality between women and men.
37. Monitor progress at EU level and promote the exchange of experience and good practice concerning measures to close the gender gap in decision-making at all levels and in all fields.
38. Actively pursue gender balance at all levels of decision-making within its own ranks.

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[1] See 13532/15 ADD 1.

[2] See Annex I. The changes aimed to improve the compatibility of the indicators with the available data in the Commission's Database on Women and Men in Decision-Making (WMID database). See EIGE'S report in doc. 13532/15 ADD 1.

[3] Including, where appropriate, employee representatives.

[4] Indicators 7 and 19.

[5] According to the definition used by the Council of Europe, the representation of either women or men should not fall below 40%.

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**Press office - General Secretariat of the Council**

Rue de la Loi 175 - B-1048 BRUSSELS - Tel.: +32 (0)2 281 6319

press.office@consilium.europa.eu - www.consilium.europa.eu/press