



Brussels, April 2012

European Women's Lobby Priorities for the Cypriot Presidency of the European Union, July-December 2012

On 01 July 2012, the Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) will pass from Denmark to Cyprus. The European Women's Lobby (EWL), the largest association of women's organisations in Europe with more than 2000 member organisations, **calls on the Cypriot Presidency to be a driving force for women's rights in Europe especially in the current financial, economic and social crisis.** Both at the European and the national level, we witness how the crisis is used to cut funding for women's rights and gender equality-related activities and institutions and how these issues are losing visibility and focus. These cuts also threaten the very existence of women's organisations. Women's NGOs are needed for the development of quality democracy, growth and welfare. This trend not only risks jeopardising recent progress, it also risks creating serious backlashes regarding for example the support and prevention of violence against women, the promotion of women's economic independence or the fight against negative gender stereotypes.

The EWL calls on the Cypriot Presidency to ensure that – in the context of the negotiations on the Multi-annual Financial Framework 2014-2020 – adequate, predictable and sustainable funding is allocated to promoting equality between women and men. We also would like to see progress in the adoption of the gender-related legislation currently on the table and in the full integration of a women's rights perspective in all European social and economic policies, including within the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy. The EWL also expresses its expectation that the Cypriot Presidency will provide progressive and ambitious leadership to the Council of the European Union in its policy and legislative tasks, in relation to issues related to women's human rights, in particular the fight against all forms of male violence against women and the guarantee of women's sexual and reproductive rights.

The European Women's Lobby calls on the Cypriot Presidency to:

1. Within the on-going negotiations on the EU Multi-annual Financial Framework 2014-2020 and the sector-specific funding programmes (in particular the Rights and Citizenship Programme and the Structural Funds), take steps to **ensure there is no degradation in the level and predictability of EU funding for activities on women's rights and gender equality, including combating violence against women.**
2. Take a leadership role in the ongoing Council negotiations aiming at advancing the adoption of the **revised maternity leave Directive¹**. This revision should include the **increase of maternity leave provisions from 14 weeks to 20 weeks and the introduction of two weeks' leave for new fathers, both fully paid**, as provided for in the legislative Resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 20 October 2010.

¹ Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Directive 92/85/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding.



3. Issue Council Conclusions requesting: 1) an **EU strategy to end violence against women** encompassing a comprehensive European action on eradicating all forms of male violence against women in the EU (including prostitution and trafficking in women)² and legal instruments; 2) 2015 to be the European Year to end violence against women, which should comprise a strong EU awareness raising campaign on violence against women; 3) the EU to become party to the Council of Europe Convention on violence against women.
4. Ensure that **all women benefit from the highest standards of sexual and reproductive health and rights**, in particular women from vulnerable groups who are at risk of discriminatory practices (forced sterilisation, sexual and genital mutilation, lack of access to safe abortion, lack of access to family planning, discrimination in the access to Assisted Reproductive Technologies, etc.), and guarantee sexual education and information for all young people in Europe.
5. Support the **proposal and adoption of binding EU-level legislation to reach parity on company boards** as a conclusion of the current consultation on this topic initiated by EC Vice-President Reding.
6. Ensure that the **promotion of equality between women and men, including the economic independence of women** as an important condition for equality between women and men; quality employment for women and men; tackling the gender pay and pension gaps; social and health services; and sustainable social development, including the target to lift at least 20 million people out of poverty³ is **at the core of the implementation, reporting and monitoring mechanisms of the Europe 2020 Strategy**. Take a leadership role in ensuring that gender equality objectives are included in the European Commission's 2013 Annual Growth Survey, which sets the framework for the European semester process in 2013, the National Reform Programmes, National Stability Programmes and country-specific recommendations.
7. In the context of the work on social inclusion, better jobs and children's rights, take a leadership role in developing targets and standards on quality and affordable **care services across the life-cycle** for children, dependent and elderly persons, including a reaffirmation and assessment of the Barcelona targets on childcare.
8. Take a leadership role in the Council negotiations in order to progress towards the adoption of the draft Directive on combating discrimination on grounds of religion or belief, age, disability or sexual orientation building on the European Parliament Resolution⁴ and the proposals made by the EWL and anti-discrimination networks. In the context of the follow-up to the European Pact for gender equality, initiate debate on the 'need to **examine the causes of multiple discrimination** and (to) explore effective ways of eliminating it.'⁵

² As promised by the European Commission and demanded by the Council in March 2010.

³ See paragraph 6 "poverty reduction should take into account the specific situation of both women and men(..)" of Council Conclusions on the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion: A European framework for social and territorial cohesion, 3073th Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council meeting, Brussels, 7 March 2012

⁴ European Parliament legislative Resolution of 02 April 2009 on the proposal for a Council Directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation (COM(2008)0426 – C6-0291/2008 – 2008/0140(CNS)), available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2009-0211+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>

⁵ Council of the European Union *Council conclusions on the European Pact for gender equality for the period 2012-2020* 3073th Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council meeting, Brussels, 7 March 2012