



22 March 2013

### JOINT CONFERENCE ON "THE GENDER DIMENSION IN THE EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY"

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE, BRUSSELS

INTERVENTION OF MS. ANU SAJAVAARA, CHAIR OF  
BUSINESSEUROPE'S EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES NETWORK

*Panel II – The political proposals on the gender dimension in the flagship initiatives of the Europe 2020 Strategy.*

- In its Opinion of 17 January 2013, the European Economic and Social Committee endorses the broad principles of the **Europe 2020** strategy and, at the same time, makes a clear case that the gender dimension is not sufficiently addressed in the seven flagship initiatives and in the country-specific recommendations.
- We need to remember that the Europe 2020 Strategy and the European semester aim to foster policy coordination in Europe. More specifically, one of the **main goals is to strengthen economic governance** with a more integrated fiscal policy and structural reforms. This is a condition sine qua non for **economic growth**, which is also absolutely necessary to address the major structural challenges of demographic aging in Europe.
- Building the right framework for economic growth through reforms is a prerequisite. In this context, we should aim at **creating more jobs**. This is essential also for **increasing women's employment rate**.
- In spite of all the progress made in the last decades in integrating women better in the labour market, in most EU countries **women's employment rate is still below 60 %**. With the real GDP growth down from +2.1 % in 2010 to -0.3 % last year, the prospects for new job opportunities are weak (for both women and men). Therefore, there is not much room for manoeuvre and there are not many alternatives in how to proceed.
- To increase women's labour market participation we need to **create incentives aiming at better utilizing women's talents and identify the barriers for women's employment**. Instead of creating mechanical and artificial solutions, such as the proposed quota directive, we should look for **sustainable solutions** and address country-specific challenges, such as availability of childcare or segmentation (segregation) of the labour market to ensure a more equal participation of men and women at the labour market.



- In our view, the EESC Opinion strongly **misses the chance to send the right message on how to effectively attract more women into the workforce.** This is a key element. To do this we need to i.e. remove financial barriers to employment, create more family-friendly jobs through flexible contractual arrangements that both women and men can use, and increase the availability and accessibility of high-quality child care.
- In this context and despite the crisis affecting some EU countries more than others, **companies and business in general remain fully engaged** in the debate on lifting employment barriers for women. They are just as committed to **promoting women’s talents through diversity measures.** Countries should aim at promoting flexible working time models in order to keep employees in the company and becoming more attractive for skilled candidates, especially women.
- **There is a lot of activity going on with regard to increasing diversity.** I would like to present a few examples. Some of these are unilateral (employers’ federations only), some are carried out together with trade unions and/or the national government.

BUSINESSEUROPE Member federations’ initiatives:

**-EK (Confederation of Finnish Industries)** launched a diversity project aiming at collecting best practices in the field of diversity management in member companies. Gender equality is one of the dimensions of diversity.

**-IBEC (Irish Business and Employers Confederation)** has taken the leadership on “Gender balance at the top”. IBEC opened the discussion by hosting gender balance debates.

**-DI (the Confederation of Danish Industry)** has created a database “Women on Board” to identify qualified female candidates for top management positions. DI also launched initiatives to encourage women to share learning about top management and their conception of senior positions with CEOs of the largest companies in Denmark.

**-SN (The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise)** has published a report entitled “Demand for talent enhances equality & diversity” describing the way its members set their ‘gender’ targets not only in boards but also in senior positions. The report also describes how companies monitor the implementation of the targets.

**-VNO (the Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers)** in cooperation with the Dutch Trade Union Federation (FNV) and the Dutch government have launched the “Talent to the top” for listed and unlisted companies, institutions and public organisations in the Netherlands. Organisation-specific quantitative targets focus on the number of women in middle and top management with a yearly review of achievements.

**-CBI (the Confederation of British Industry)** has launched a guide “Diversity in the Boardroom”, for business and board-ready candidates published jointly with the Government Equalities Office.



The above-mentioned initiatives have shown remarkable progress in promoting diversity at every echelon and increase the share of women in senior management.

- **At company level**, we are also witnessing “individual” (own-programme) and “collective” (i.e. stock exchange indexes like the DAX 30) initiatives.
- At the EU level the **EU social partners are taking action under their joint work programme.**

EU Social partners' initiatives:

In their work programme for 2012-14 the EU Social partners agree that further action is needed to address remaining inequalities between women and men including the gender pay gap. At the same time, we **recognize that the four priorities agreed in the 2005 Framework of Actions on gender equality remain valid and essential.** We agreed to continue to act on them and promote successful experiences identified at enterprise level in the follow-up of the Framework of Action.

We will do so in the form of a **toolkit** to help the setting up of measures: this will encompass a web-based database, a brochure, a video and a conference. We have started working with a subcontractor. The project received the financial support of the European Commission.

- Thank you.

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