



REGERINGSKANSLIET

Memorandum

31 August 2009

Ministry of Integration and Gender
Equality

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Draft speaking points for Nyamko Sabuni's meeting with
the European Parliament Committee on Women's Rights and
Gender Equality (FEMM), 1 September**

Madam Chair, Honourable Members of the European Parliament,

Introduction

- Thank you for inviting me to appear before the Committee to present Sweden's priorities in the area of gender equality. The European Parliament will be an important partner during the Swedish Presidency. It is therefore valuable for myself and my colleagues both to have the opportunity to discuss your work and to hear your expectations of the Swedish Presidency.
- I would like to begin by telling you about priorities and activities in the area of gender equality during the Swedish Presidency. I hope that we can then hold a joint discussion.

Sweden's priorities in the area of gender equality during the Presidency

- The financial and economic crisis will have a strong impact on the Swedish Presidency. The largest and most important challenges before us is the economy, employment and climate change – challenges that affect all of us as EU citizens.
- The Presidency's principal aim is that the EU will emerge from the economic crisis in a stronger position. A common capacity for action in both the financial and economic fields and in the labour market is necessary if the EU is to be able to meet the crisis in an effective manner. The Presidency and the Member States will jointly continue to work to counter the negative impact of the crisis on growth and jobs with the aim of realising economic recovery as soon as possible.

- I am convinced that an increased gender dimension in EU's continued work for sustainable growth and employment is an important prerequisite in order to meet the goals of full employment and reduced social exclusion. Increased gender equality makes economic sense.
- Opportunities to make use of both women's and men's skills and labour are and will remain critical to economic growth and future development on the labour market. Families in which both men and women are on the labour market are less vulnerable in times of economic downturn and increasing unemployment.
- During the Swedish Presidency of the EU I will draw particular attention to the link between gender equality and economic growth. This will be the theme of a conference to be held in Stockholm in October. Its purpose is to increase knowledge and create understanding of the importance of gender equality for sustainable economic growth, social cohesion and, therefore, increased welfare.
- The design of the future Lisbon Strategy gives us a good opportunity to demonstrate our political will to strengthen gender equality and help give women and men the same opportunities to shape society and their own lives.
- Women's employment has been the primary reason for the continuous increase in employment rates in the EU during the recent years. However, in order to utilise the full potential of women's employment we need to combat the pay gap and the segregated labour market, as well as encourage women's entrepreneurship.
- Despite few formal restrictions existing for women's participation in the labour market, women still lack equal opportunities when it comes to participating fully in working life. Not the least, when it comes to women's possibilities to access the labour market, stay in continuous employment and progress through promotion and career development.
- This is manifested through the pay gap between men and women, inequalities in career opportunities, differences in sick leave, unequal use of parental leave, lack of women in self-employment and women being underrepresented in management board positions.
- It is therefore important we develop a clearer strategy with measures for how to increase women's employment. The Presidency is planning for a policy debate on gender equality strengthening jobs and growth at the EPSCO Council in December and our hope is that Council conclusions can be adopted on how to include a clearer gender equality perspective in the post 2010 Lisbon agenda. Access to childcare within the EU is a precondition if the Union is to meet its goals on economic growth.

- Another area of priority during the Presidency is to combat violence against women. This is a question about democracy and human rights. Nothing restricts a human being's individual freedom as violence does.
- Combating men's violence against women is one of the most urgent gender equality issues and also one that we prioritise. Apart from the basic fact that all individuals should be protected from violence, this form of violence also represents a great financial cost to society. A woman who is a victim of violence cannot participate in economic life, cannot go to work. She cannot look after her children, but instead the children have to look after her. She cannot make free choices in life. This is a question of the costs of legal proceedings, health care and sick leave.
- During the Swedish Presidency the issue of violence against women will put on the political agenda and dealt with at different levels. We will highlight the issues through an expert conference in Stockholm in November. The primary purpose of this conference is to exchange experience and discuss how to develop measures in the Member States in this area.
- The Presidency continues the negotiations on the draft directive on self-employed people and assisting spouses must be seen in this light. We look forward to a frank and close dialogue with you in the European Parliament. We aim to make as much progress as possible in the negotiations during our Presidency. This legislation is important as it combats discrimination on the grounds of gender and makes it easier for women to start their own business.
- The negotiations so far in the Council on the draft directive on maternity leave show that there is still a great deal of work to be done. On this issue, too, we look forward to an open and close dialogue with the European Parliament. Our primary goal is to take the negotiations forward.
- Sweden will also compile a report on how the commitments made by the EU Member States in the Beijing Action Platform have been implemented. This report will be presented when the UN celebrates Beijing +15 in spring 2010.
- Within the framework of a Union for the Mediterranean, a ministerial meeting of gender equality ministers will be held in Morocco to discuss how to strengthen women's participation in society.
- In order to succeed in our ambition to mainstream a gender equality perspective in different policy areas, we need good examples and I look forward to a fruitful cooperation between the Presidency, the European Parliament, the Commission and civil society.

Thank you Madam Chair!