

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
Public Hearing
"Women in International Politics"
Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality
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- Honorable members of the European Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am very pleased to address this public hearing on women in international politics. The European Commission considers the equal participation of women and men in decision-making to be of the utmost importance, and I thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk about what we are doing in this area.
- As the situation stands today, men still make most of the decisions. Women continue to be under-represented in the political as well as in the economic spheres. This marks a fundamental democratic deficit both at European level and in the wider international context.
- Indeed throughout the world, the persistent under-representation of women in both political and economic decision-making positions results in the perpetuation of attitudes and practices that do not serve the needs of women and men equally.
- The European Commission has been active these past several years in the field of women and decision-making. The Treaty of the European Union defines the promotion of equality between women and men as a central task of the European Community and therefore provides the basis for our work.
- Back in 1996, the Council issued a recommendation on the balanced participation of women and men in decision making¹. A report by the Commission in 2000 concluded that the policies implemented since 1996 had had a positive effect overall. However, original expectations had not been met and so it was clear that more needed to be done.
- In 2003 the Commission continued its efforts and in 2003 funded 24 transnational projects to promote gender balance in decision making and help raise people's general awareness about this key issue.
- In 2004, the Commission also set up a database to collect figures and statistics on women and men in politics, public administration, including the judiciary, the economy and social life. The database uses the indicators presented by the Finnish

¹ OJ L 319 10.12.96 p.11

Presidency in 1999 to measure progress and has been an excellent tool to raise awareness of women's participation in decision-making in Europe. Since its launch, the database has been expanded and now covers 31 countries, including Turkey since this year.

- Let me share with you some figures from the Commission database:
 - Only Spain, Sweden and Norway now have parity in their *Governments*. Austria has actually more women than men as senior ministers (55%). The estimated European average of women's participation in national Governments is still far from being gender balanced: 23%.
 - In the European Union women ministers are more likely to take up positions in traditional socio-cultural areas (37%). It is less frequent to find women ministers in economic functions (17%).
 - The situation is the same concerning women's share of power in *national Parliaments* (estimated average: 23%).
- As you can see the picture is not ideal for our democratic societies. While there have been some improvements in certain countries, the catching up is still low in most countries.
- This is why the Commission considers monitoring to be extremely important. These past few years now, the Commission has been presenting to the European Spring Council an annual Report on equality between women and men. The Report provides an overview of progress made by women in the main policy areas and addresses key challenges including in the area of decision-making.
- In March of this year the Commission adopted its Roadmap on equality between women and men for the period 2006-2010 and defined equal representation in decision-making as one of the six priority areas for action.
- One of the key initiatives the Commission is planning is to set up an EU forum, a network of women in top economic and political decision-making positions. The aim is to give renewed momentum to the debate at European and national level and to focus minds on the need to speed up concrete progress in the area of decision-making.

- Also, in view of the European Parliament elections in 2009 the Commission will be supporting awareness-raising activities and the exchange of good practices and research.
- In the past decade, the European Union's efforts to increase women's participation in decision-making have been consistent, but have not always produced the results anticipated. The picture is quite complex, and therefore we cannot expect simple solutions. We need a multifaceted strategy bringing together all the players working towards a common goal.
- If we look at the different factors keeping women away from the centre of the decision-making process, not only do we see stereotypes and discrimination, but we also see an imbalanced division of work and family responsibilities.
- If we want to encourage women to work then we need more family friendly policies and workplaces that are aimed not only at women but also at men. We also need to eliminate the pay gap and ensure women's equal economic independence with men. For is it really possible to talk about equality between women and men, when women are paid 15 percent less than men? Is it really surprising that men dominate in political and economic decision making when it is still mainly women who look after the children, the elderly, the disabled?
- The Roadmap stresses the importance of stronger governance at all levels: EU institutions, Member States, parliaments, social partners and civil society. This is especially important for the European strategy for growth and jobs aimed at ensuring sustainable development and social inclusion. The European Commission believes that if we are to reach this objective, it is essential that women be present in all fields and at all levels of our economic, social and political life. I say this because promoting women in decision-making is not only about equal rights but also about making use of all the resources our societies have to offer.
- Finally the Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men has a strong external dimension. Promoting gender sensitive policies and political participation of women in decision making will be a priority of the Union's development and external policy in the years to come.