



Delegation to the EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee

Delegation for relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo

Delegation to the EU-Montenegro Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee

Delegation to the EU-North Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee

Delegation to the EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee

Delegation to the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee

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MINUTES

of the joint meeting of 11 May 2021, 14.00-16.00

Brussels

The meeting opened at 14.00 on Tuesday, 11 May 2021, with Tonino Picula (Chair) presiding.

1. Introduction and opening remarks by Mr Tonino Picula, Chair of AFET Working group on the Western Balkans and EP Standing Rapporteur for Montenegro

The meeting opened at 14h with Tonino Picula Chair of the AFET Western Balkans Working Group who introduced the meeting's format and guest speakers. He explained the thematic and geographical blocks' structure and invited Members to engage in exchange of views after each block. According to Mr Picula, contemporary developments in the region concern different perspectives of gender in-equalities. He welcomed the valuable opportunity to exchange views with regional civil society experts, professionals, and scholars from the Western Balkans and Turkey on current issues and invited Members to actively engage in the debate.

2a. Exchange of views with gender equality and women's rights experts from Western Balkans and Turkey on 'Striving for equality in the workplace and access to qualified jobs in Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina'

Members were given informative presentations by regional experts Milica Marinković (Serbia), Slavica Striković (Montenegro) and Munira Šesti (Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Ms Milica Marinković, Senior Policy Officer from A11 Initiative for Economic and Social Rights Belgrade presented to Members with the latest data on women's labour rights violations in Serbia's trade sector. Furthermore, she gave recommendations on how to improve institutional practices in preventing discrimination against women in the labour market, and expressed concern over the lack of judicial protection with regard to gender-based discrimination in the labour market. In a study conducted by the *A11* during the period 2019-2020, findings indicate that workers lack knowledge of the relevant procedures meant to tackle discrimination, and that there are few labour inspectors, a high incidence of corruption and a lack of trust in the inspectors, which leads to cases of discrimination not being addressed.

Ms Slavica Striković, media expert, board member of public broadcaster and former Ombudsperson of private TV station from Montenegro provided insight on gender-based inequalities in the professional media market, and focused on the recent attacks on female journalists in the country. She highlighted the case of journalist Duška Pejović (from the public service broadcaster), who had been subjected to threats and hate speech on both a personal and professional level, following an interview with newly elected Deputy Prime Minister Dritan Abazovic. The new coalition wrote an open letter to call for the head of the public service broadcaster to stand aside, which Striković described as a blow towards media freedom and pluralism in the country. The attacks on and cases of hate speech towards female journalists have been condemned by the EU and various CSOs but have not received any reaction from national institutions, who have not established any responsibility or accountability.

Dr Munira Šesti, Assistant Professor, University of Sarajevo - School of Economics and Business from Bosnia and Herzegovina wrapped up the first discussion block by presenting the precarious situation and obstacles for female entrepreneurs in the country. According to her research findings, the main work discrimination factors and obstacles for entrepreneurs in Bosnia and Herzegovina are ethnicity and gender, which she described as the dual context, which impedes economic incentives and motivation for women to start their own businesses. In addition, she argued that the transitional, post-conflict context of the country has been recognised by local female entrepreneurs as having a negative effect on the economic motivation and entrepreneurial behaviour, along with the current pandemic that has hit female entrepreneurs the hardest. The economic position of women is difficult to measure due to lack of national data, but the significant difference between men and women is nevertheless evident.

2b. Exchange of views with gender equality and women's rights experts from Western Balkans and Turkey on 'Balancing between Freedom of Expression, Right to Privacy and Freedom from Violence in North Macedonia and Kosovo'

Members had the chance to exchange views with Marta Gusar (North Macedonia) and Dr Bergita Curri (Kosovo) on different forms of gender-based violence (GBV).

Ms Marta Gusar, Skopje-based private attorney-at-law from North Macedonia gave an account of her personal and professional experiences regarding the case known as “*Javna Soba*”

(“Public Room”). As a lawyer who advocates for legislation changes to prosecute online violence against women and girls, she has herself been targeted and subjected to gender-based violence on social media. The online network *Telegram* where men share personal information and compromising material of women, has only recently received attention from the state authorities who decided to shut it down a few months ago. However, Gusar argued that the reaction from the competent institutions has been insufficient as they have failed to recognize these events as cases of violence. In addition, the institutional response has been misdirected, as the blame continues to fall on the victims rather than the perpetrators.

Dr Bergita Curri, Forensic Medicine Specialist, Institute of Forensic Medicine Kosovo gave an account of different forms of violence against women and children, focusing on biological evidence. The incidence of domestic and sexual violence in Kosovo is high and increasing, with the majority of victims being minors. The young age distribution is very particular for Kosovo, which is why Dr Curri stressed the importance of spreading awareness and knowledge in schools. Furthermore, she argued that Kosovo may have criminalized domestic violence and marital rape and approved protocol for protection for both women and children, but issues such as late institutional response, low punishments, social stigma, low trust in institutions, patriarchal values in the court, underreported cases, neglect from officials, victim-blaming, and skewed public perception of violence remain issues of concern. The national Institute of Forensic Medicine in Kosovo is one of few institutions which have voiced concern over GBV and which have taken a more proactive role in combating its different forms.

MEP Tanja Fajon welcomed the presentations and the opportunity to exchange views with experts. She regretted the deteriorating situation in the region regarding women’s rights and mentioned the EP’s efforts to put pressure on the authorities. She highlighted the case of North Macedonia, and informed that the EP’s report on the country contains a paragraph about gender equality in terms of representation in decision-making positions. Regarding Serbia, she expressed concern over the new law on gender equality, the socio-economic status of women in the country, and the patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes present in the society. Finally, she commented on the Istanbul Convention and the “Sofagate” incident.

2c. Exchange of views with gender equality and women’s rights experts from Western Balkans and Turkey on ‘How International Legal Instruments Influence Access to Safe Health Services in the Context of Pandemic Restrictions’

In the third geographical and thematic block Bruna Hylviu (Albania), and Deniz Bayram (Turkey) explained how pandemic restrictions and Istanbul convention withdrawal impact access to health and social services for women.

Bruna Hylviu, Executive Director of Albania Center of Population and Development, opened up the last block and shared information about how women in Albania have been affected by the current pandemic. The lockdown measures in the country have had a negative impact on access to safe social and reproductive health services and rights such as cervical screening and testing, HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infections test, safe abortion care, gynaecological visits, contraception and GBV protection services, due to limited opening hours, centralized services, closing of clinics, limited demand related to fear of getting infected, lack of precautions and lack of protocols in place. These restrictions have had a particularly negative impact on the most vulnerable and marginalized groups (poor, minority and rural women), which lack access to quality services, knowledge and information. The ACPD together with various CSOs are therefore actively working on spreading awareness, creating equal opportunities for

marginalized groups, offering online consultation and training for healthcare providers, and shaping relevant legislation.

Deniz Bayram, legal Counsel working for various non-profit organisations from Turkey divided her presentation into two topics: access to legal, social and health services, and the country's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. The confinement measures have both intensified GBV and created barriers for women to access legal, social, and economic measures. Deniz argued that the lack of pandemic-tailored measures has become an excuse for authorities to circumvent the rules, to not follow required laws and regulations, and to arbitrarily deny women who experience GBV support and access to economic measures. Regarding the Istanbul Convention, she argued that the authorities view the convention not as a legal tool meant to empower and protect women but as an attack on families and Turkish values, culture and tradition. Furthermore, as the Convention constitutes a comprehensive agreement regulating minority rights and protection against intersectional violence, she argued that the withdrawal will have an impact on women from different minority groups.

MEP Isabel Santos directed a few questions to Dr Curri regarding GBV, enquired about the number of abortion-related deaths in Albania and expressed her wish to visit the ACPD during her next mission to Albania.

MEP Romeo Franz expressed his concern over the situation for Roma women and their case of multiple discrimination, and asked about how relevant organisations in the region reach out to and try to improve the situation for women who undergo forced sterilisation.

The meeting closed at 15:50.

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ANWESENHEITSLISTE/KOHALOLIJATE NIMEKIRI/ /RECORD OF ATTENDANCE/
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<p>/Mesa/P edsednictvo/Formandskabet/Vorstand/Juhatus/ Biuras/Elnökség/Prezydium/Birou/Predsedníctvo/Predsedstvo/Puheenjohtajisto/Presidiet (*)</p>	<p>/Bureau/Predsjedništvo/Ufficio di presidenza/Prezidijs/ Nariai/Képviselők/Membri/Leden/Posłowie/Deputados/Deputati/Deputati/ /Diputados/Poslanci/Medlemmer/Mitglieder/Parlamendiliikmed/ Nariai/Képviselők/Membri/Leden/Posłowie/Deputados/Deputati/Deputati/ /Members/Députés/Zastupnici/Deputati/Deputati/ /Substitutes/Suppléants/Zamjenici/ Supplenti/Aizstāji/Pavaduojantysnariai/Póttagok/Sostituti/Plaatsvervangers/Zastupcy/Membros suplentes/Supleani/Náhradníci/ Namestniki/Varajäsenet/Suppleanter</p>
<p>Tonino Picula (Chair)</p>	<p>Tanja Fajon,, Romeo Franz, Sergey Lagodinsky, Andreas Schieder, Isabel Santos, Tomislav Sokol, Viola Von Cramon-Taubadel</p>
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<p>Ms Milica Marinković, Senior Policy Advisor from A11 Initiative for Economic and Social Rights in Belgrade, Serbia;</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>Ms Slavica Striković, Media expert, Board Member of Public Broadcaster and Executive Director at WNGO Women Action, Montenegro;</p>	<p></p>
<p>Dr Munira Šestić, Assistant Professor from the University of Sarajevo, School of Economics and Business, Bosnia and Herzegovina;</p>	<p></p>
<p>Ms Marta Gusar, Skopje-based private attorney at law, legal adviser for the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, Network for Victims of Domestic Violence, North Macedonia;</p>	<p></p>
<p>Dr Bergita Curri, Forensic Medicine Specialist of the Institute of Forensic Medicine Kosovo;</p>	<p></p>
<p>Ms Bruna Hylviu, Executive Director of Albanian Centre of Population and Development (ACPD) in Tirana, Albania;</p>	<p></p>
<p>Ms Deniz Bayram, Istanbul-based feminist lawyer and independent legal counsel working for various non-profit organisations, Turkey;</p>	<p></p>

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<p>/Otras instituciones y organismos/Ostatní orgány a instituce/Andre institutioner og organer/Andere Organe und Einrichtungen/Muud institutsioonid ja organid/ μ μ /Other institutions and bodies/Autres institutions et organes/Druge institucije i tijela/Altre istituzioni e altri organi/Citas iest des un strukt ras/Kitos institucijos ir staigas/ Más intézmények és szervek/Istituzzjonijiet u korpi o ra/Andere instellingen en organen/Inne instytucje i organy/Outras instituições e outros órgãos/Alte instituiții și organe/Iné inštitúcie a orgány/Muut toimielimet ja elimet/Andra institutioner och organ</p>
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Eliska Gerthnerova, Peter Lang, André De Munter, Tatiana Mrazikova

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 Avustaja/Assistenter

Kristine Sproge, Vesselina Veleva

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