



**Statement on behalf of the
European Union and its Member States**

**At the
UNECE
Beijing + 20 Regional Review Meeting
Geneva, 6-7 November 2014**

Women's representation and leadership in policy and decision-making

Item 6

Geneva, 7th November 2014

Item 6: Women's representation and leadership in policy and decision-making
Position of the European Union and its Member States

Chair,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

The following countries align themselves with this declaration¹: Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Iceland, Serbia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Armenia.

Equal representation of women and men in political and economic decision-making is a matter of full enjoyment of human rights and of social justice and a necessary condition for the better functioning of a democratic society. It leads to more efficient policy making through the redefinition of political priorities and the placing of new issues on the political agenda.

This panel discussion provides us with an opportunity to discuss policies and measures to increase gender balanced representation in ECE region, to exchange good practices and learn from each other. Together, we should identify the best comprehensive strategies to make further and rapid progress. In this respect there are several relevant EU actions that can be mentioned:

- "Equality in decision-making" is one of the six priority areas of action in the European Commission's Strategy for equality between women and men (2010-2015). Therefore, at EU level, awareness raising activities and exchanges of good practice have been supported and civil society organisations transnational actions have been financed. For example, 23 projects aiming at promoting gender balance in economic decision-making at all levels are currently being implemented with EU financial support. At EU level, a proposal for a Directive on improving the gender balance among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges is currently under discussion.
- With the European Pact for Gender Equality (2011-2020), the EU Member States also committed to prioritise the promotion of the equal participation of women in decision-

¹ Turkey is a Candidate country; the Candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania as well as potential candidate country Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process; Candidate Country Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.

making. Regulatory and non-regulatory measures have been used at national level to improve the situation.

- Our efforts also address the monitoring of the situation by collecting data using common indicators developed at EU level (under the framework of the follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action). In this context, we established in 2003 a EU database on women and men in high decision-making positions in various fields (politics, public administrations, judiciary, business, etc) accessible on-line. We report regularly on progress made through our annual Report on equality between women and men and through specific reports on the topic.

However, despite progress made in many EU Member States and numerous actions undertaken, women continue to be under-represented in politics and progress has been slow (and even stagnated) in some other EU countries. Data from July 2014 shows that the single/lower houses of EU national parliaments comprised, on average, 72% men and just 28% women. On average, women were represented in EU Member States governments at the same rate (28%).² Even if some Member States perform much better than others, it is not acceptable that in the EU countries women have not yet the same opportunities as men to participate in the formulation of policies that impact on their lives.

Furthermore, the under-representation of women in leadership positions in the corporate sector is still more disappointing. In April 2014, women accounted only for 18.6% of board members of the largest publicly listed companies registered in the EU. This underutilization of the skills of women, in particular highly qualified women constitutes a loss of economic growth potential. Research from various sources suggests that gender equality in economic decision-making improves the quality and effectiveness of corporate governance and of corporate organisational and financial performance. Reinforcing equal gender representation in managerial positions can have a positive impact on companies' innovativeness and efficiency as well as their public image. By bringing the competences of both women and men into play, we can draw on all possible expertise and resources, promote diversity in the boardroom and also allow women to make their voices heard in economic decision-making. Equal opportunities for women and men is part of corporate social responsibility.

States should actively help increase the number of women in leadership positions. Possible measures include gender balance targets and quotas, incentives to attract women to management

² Percentage refers to senior ministers: those who have a seat in the Cabinet.

positions, transparent evaluation and promotion systems, and support to networking and mentoring programs, female role models and grass roots organisations. Achieving gender equality necessitates real cultural change that cannot be achieved by governments or legislation alone. A voluntary, business-led initiative may also be a powerful driver of change, where governments help the private sector to think about gender equality in their workforces, and take actions where inequalities are identified. These measures should not be isolated but be part of a strategic plan to achieve gender equality.

Thank you chair.

Question to the panellists:

- Achieving gender balance in decision-making positions remains an important challenge for many countries and a comprehensive approach is necessary to tackle the existing barriers. Which measures, regulatory or non-regulatory or combinations of both, have proven to be most efficient to deliver progress? How can we make more rapid and effective progress?