



HELLENIC REPUBLIC
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GENERAL SECRETARIAT FOR GENDER EQUALITY

SPEECH
of the General Secretary for Gender Equality
Ms Eugenia Tsoumani

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a particular honor for my country to participate in today's panel of the Economic Commission of the United Nations for Europe, focusing on the review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action, a review which is to take place during a period marked by significant political, economic and geopolitical changes at a global level, the impact of which is evident in the wider European area.

First of all, I would like to refer to the role of the United Nations in promoting gender equality and the status of women in all fields of life.

Through the activities of the United Nations and with the adoption of several international conventions, regulations as well as resolutions, the creation of a pioneering regulatory framework for such issues has been achieved.

The continuing discrimination against women throughout the world and the violation of basic rules concerning the protection of human rights have led the United Nations to a timely realization of the need for a special Committee for the Status of Women. The elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and the notion of genuine equality constitute the core of this colossal and laborious effort of the United Nations since their establishment.

In 1979, the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was adopted. This Convention was

complemented by the ratification of the Optional Protocol, which came into force on the 22nd of December 2000, and constitutes the basis for the recognition of the jurisdiction of the Commission for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women to examine individual or collective appeals of women who have exhausted all national legal means. Greece has been one of the first 22 countries to sign this Protocol.

An important milestone in the United Nations activities has been the Fourth International Conference on Women, in Beijing, in 1995, where it was generally agreed that issues concerning women are of a spherical and ecumenical character and that gender equality is essential for the construction of just and democratic societies. At the same time, it was explicitly recognized that the rights of women are human rights and that if they are not fully recognized and genuinely protected by the national legal systems then we'll have to face truncated development and a deficit of true democracy.

Despite the positive steps taken since, it seems that in Europe women continue to face serious hindrances as far as their participation in social, economic, political and professional life is concerned. In relation to the position of women in economy, in particular, I would like to mention a number of issues, which I deem open to further improvement in Europe, and therefore posing future challenges.

- Promotion of women's economic rights, through the creation of the appropriate conditions for access to employment. A crucial

issue is the actual implementation of equal pay for work of equal value.

- Elimination of occupational segregation, both horizontal and vertical.
- Facilitation of equal access of women to goods, services, markets and trade. Also, promotion of self-employment through the encouragement of creating small businesses for women, and generally, creation of mechanisms to support women's entrepreneurship.
- Provision of services of access to information and technologies, especially for low-income women. Taking measures for the safeguarding of equal access of women to continuing training is a necessary precondition.
- Promotion of policies that deal with the structural causes of women's poverty and development of a research methodology which will include the dimension of sex, aiming to contain the phenomenon of the feminization of poverty.
- Promotion of the harmonization of familial and professional demands through structures and means, which will also lead to the redistribution of roles and responsibilities between the sexes within the family.

In Greece, we have worked out an integrated and cohesive strategic intervention at governmental level, for the period 2004-2008, aiming to promote equal opportunities between the sexes. Its main aim is to push forward the political, economic, social and developmental dimension of equality issues and their immediate connection to our national priorities (development, employment, social cohesion).

Based on this strategy we are already developing actions aiming to combat the equality deficit in employment, the labor market and industrial relations as well as the stereotyped views on the role of the sexes through education. These actions also aim at strengthening further the participation of women in decision making centers and, of course, to prevent and combat violence against women.

According to the Beijing Platform of Action, violence against women is the result of the discrimination against women and it represents encroachment upon their human rights. Illicit trafficking and trading in human beings, particularly women and children, aiming, mainly, at their sexual, commercial and labor exploitation, constitute an important dimension of violence as well as the scourge of our times.

It is a phenomenon that troubles the international community, which reacts by promoting a series of international conventions in order to address it.

It is estimated that the above-mentioned phenomenon constitutes the third most sizable "crime enterprise", following/next to illicit drugs and arms trafficking. According to UNICEF calculations, about 1 000 000 women are pushed to prostitution every year. Other international organizations estimate that, in Western European countries, about 700 000 women were pushed to prostitution, through use of force, deceit or purchase, in the year 2000 alone. It is estimated that through these illegal "enterprises" of organized crime, in the year 2000, there ensued, at the international level, profits of approximately 7 million Euros.

Very often, the plight of the above-mentioned women is aggravated by other social factors such as social exclusion, ignorance of the language or financial difficulties.

The problem has taken on enormous dimensions as a result of the continually swelling migratory flows, as thousands of people, propelled by expectations for amelioration of their life conditions and their standard of living have fallen prey to ruthless criminals.

Trafficking in human beings, especially related to the financial exploitation of the victims' sex and referring in particular to women and children, is connected to other acts that are punishable by law, such as illicit drug trafficking, children's pornography, illegal exploitation, and corruption, a fact that renders the need for a drastic response to this phenomenon imperative.

Preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and the sexual exploitation of women and children constitutes a priority for the European Union according both to the Amsterdam Treaty and to the conclusions of the European Council in Tampere.

Since 2001, the Greek State has started to confront this phenomenon in an integrated fashion, as a crime requiring special handling. A significant first step has been the establishment of the Group for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings. The aim of this interministerial body has been the change of the legal framework and the provision of information on the problem.

Recently the Greek government has proceeded to work out an integrated National Action Plan against the illicit trafficking in human beings. The Project is based on the coordination of competent Ministries and covers the entire spectrum of activities connected to illicit trafficking. In particular:

- Monitoring the phenomenon – locating the victim
- Identifying and protecting the victim
- Establishment of shelters where the victims are provided with medical and psychological support, as well as legal assistance
- Administrative support – issuing a residence permit which is also valid as a work permit
- Voluntary repatriation, financed by reinstatement programs
- Education and integration into the labor market, for victims who remain in Greece
- Training of the Police force, Judges and Public Prosecutors
- Providing information and raising public awareness
- Establishment of a national data base for monitoring purposes

The General Secretariat for Gender Equality sees to the immediate provision of counseling and sociopsychological support to women victims of trafficking and directs them towards employment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are facing a phenomenon with extremely negative consequences for our societies. Many thousands of women in our region are victims of a contemporary type of slavery; they are

psychologically, morally and physically damaged and become, without their knowledge, vehicles for the perpetuation of crime.

The intensity of this phenomenon in Europe is closely related to the political and economic reordering in the area, which has created pockets of poverty and intense migratory movements, phenomena that influence mainly women. The challenge for Europe today is double. European policies must, on the one hand, support and strengthen economic development and the social protection systems of the countries belonging to the central and eastern axis, which are mainly the countries of origin of the victims. On the other hand, the nation states are under the obligation to develop mechanisms of systematic support for the victims and of cooperation with NGOs whose role may well be important.

The activation of society and the exchange of expertise between countries, as well as the diffusion of good practices will contribute significantly to this direction.

I thank you for your attention and I hope the proceedings of this meeting will be fruitful.