



EURONEST PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY  
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Plenary session

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## RESOLUTION

on the situation of women in the labour market in the Eastern European partners

## **EURONEST PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY – RESOLUTION**

### **on the situation of women in the labour market in the Eastern European partners**

*The Euronest Parliamentary Assembly,*

- having regard to the Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit (Vilnius, 28-29 November 2013) Eastern Partnership: the way ahead,
  - having regard to the Joint Declaration of the Warsaw Eastern Partnership Summit of 29-30 September 2011,
  - having regard to the European Parliament's resolution of 13 December 2016 on the rights of women in the Eastern Partnership states,
  - having regard to the European Parliament's resolution of 23 October 2013 on '*European Neighbourhood Policy, working towards a stronger partnership – European Parliament's position on the 2012 progress reports*',
  - having regard to the Constituent Act of the EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly of 3 May 2011,
- A. whereas, according to the Prague Declaration, the Partnership is based on commitments to the principles of international law and to fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; whereas the Riga Declaration referred to gender equality as a 'promising new area of cooperation';
- B. whereas enhanced differentiation between, and greater ownership by, partner countries are key principles for the reviewed ENP, taking into account the specific situation of each country;
- C. whereas due consideration should be given to the objective of achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, as enshrined in the fifth of the sustainable development goals approved for 2016-2030 at the UN Sustainable Development Summit held on 25-27 September 2015 at the UN headquarters in New York;
- D. whereas gender equality between women and men is enshrined in the constitutions and legal systems of all the Eastern European partners, and all the countries have ratified most of the important international conventions in this area without reservations;
- E. whereas all the Eastern European partners have developed strategies, programmes or action plans to improve the situation of women;
- F. whereas vertical and horizontal segregation of women's employment in the labour markets of the Eastern European partners remains entrenched in cultural and social norms; whereas women are also burdened by the 'second shift' of unpaid domestic work;
- G. whereas stereotypes can have a negative impact on the role women can play, and these may be reflected in educational and training choices and continue into the labour market;

- H. whereas while significant differences exist between the Eastern European partners concerning the prevalence of violence against women, the rate is relatively high; whereas the risk of violence is much higher for women belonging to ethnic minorities, such as the Roma; whereas Romani girls and women face double discrimination due to gender and ethnic origin, as demonstrated by their lower levels of education, significantly higher rates of unemployment and poorer health than the rest of the population;
- I. whereas in Ukraine more than 1,5 million people – two thirds of them women and children – have been internally displaced since the aggression of terrorist forces began and suffer from impeded access to healthcare, housing and employment; whereas Roma girls in Moldova spend on average less than four years in school, compared to 11 years for non-Roma girls, as a result of child and early marriages, unplanned pregnancies and childcare responsibilities;
- J. whereas the EU and its Member States are committed to the protection, fulfilment and enjoyment of human rights by women and girls; whereas gender equality remains a horizontal priority within the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), and whereas the reviewed ENP should include enhanced support for civil society and a renewed focus on the importance of gender equality; whereas civil society plays a very important role in achieving gender equality in the Eastern Partnership;

### **Gender Equality: Normative Framework**

1. Underlines that all EU Member States and all Eastern European partners have signed and ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW);
2. Recalls that while Part III (Articles 10-14) describes the economic and social rights of women, Article 11 of the Convention specifically focuses on employment: right to the same employment opportunities, right to free choice of profession, right to promotion, job security and all benefits and conditions of service, right to receive vocational training, right to equal remuneration, right to social security, right to maternity leave and a prohibition of dismissal on the grounds of pregnancy;
3. Further underlines that Articles 2 and 3(3) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) establish gender equality as one of the main principles on which the EU is founded; Article 23 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union furthermore states that equality between men and women must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay;
4. Recalls that Article 22 (TEU) stresses that the EU's action on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation;
5. Stresses that the gender equality *acquis* which the EU has developed is an important and relevant factor in this respect; underlines that this includes both the legislation and the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union on gender equality issues;
6. At the same time, strongly believes that room for further improvement on gender equality

issues exists in both the EU and the Eastern European partners, and that the exchange of good practices could be beneficial for all;

### **Trends in the Eastern European partners**

7. Understands that the situation of women in the labour markets of the Eastern European partners knows national or local differentiation, but nonetheless feels that some common trends can be identified, such as comparatively small gaps in male/female employment rates, a high level of education or the concentration of women in specific sectors of the economy;
8. Reminds that according to the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report and its Economic Participation and Opportunity sub index, which measures the average of several factors, including labour force participation or wage equality Eastern European partners score from 66 (Armenia) to 74 (Moldova) – a more homogenous, thus, group than EU countries, which score from 67 (Hungary) to 85 (Finland);
9. Welcomes, thus, the relatively high level of women's integration in the labour force in the countries of the Eastern Partnership, which is likely to be due to their common historical experiences; regrets, however, the fact that women's participation in the labour force seems to have been declining over the past decades as a result of the retraditionalisation process observed in the partner countries;
10. Underlines that while some variations remain between Eastern European partners, a lack of standardized official statistics may contribute to disparities being hidden, such as de facto inactivity (isolation from the labour market) and poverty of women on long periods of maternity leaves and early retirements; likewise, other possible disparities can be observed in terms of differences in job security, or respect for labour rights and wages, especially between the formal and informal and private and public sectors;
11. Regrets that the gender pay gap remains high and can be as much as 50 %, despite the fact that a higher proportion of young women than men gain a university education in some of the Eastern Partnership countries, with women encountering a number of cultural and sociological barriers in their access to managerial positions, as is also often the case in the EU;
12. Stresses that female entrepreneurship may additionally be hindered by stereotypes, limited access to capital and networks, corruption and sometimes high regulatory burdens; as in the EU, women are also burdened by the second shift of unpaid domestic work, which has, in some cases, been exacerbated by the rollback of social security programmes, after the transition to a market economy;
13. Furthermore underlines that unemployment, underemployment, as well as insecure and underpaid jobs may put women at risk of prolonged poverty; fears that this may lead to irregular migration and to women becoming the victims of smugglers and traffickers; particularly stresses that vulnerable groups, such as Roma women, are at an accrued risk and that only low numbers of Romani trafficked women or children denounce their traffickers and access the victim prevention and protection services;

14. Underlines that the different categories of migrant women from Eastern European partners who, as workers, are in low-paid jobs, and who may never acquire eligibility for permanent stay or citizenship, unlike professional migrant workers in the country of employment may be at high risk of abuse and discrimination; fears that this may cause a serious problems with the access to health services, including reproductive health services, because insurance or national health schemes are not available to them, or they may have to pay unaffordable fees;

#### **EU- Eastern European partners cooperation in the field**

15. Welcomes the fact that, within the ENP's Strategic Priorities for 2014-2020, gender equality has been emphasised as a cross-cutting issue that has to be addressed and mainstreamed in all relevant activities;
16. Further welcomes that European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) Action Plans for all the Eastern Partnership countries (except Belarus), deal with gender equality, with a view to gradually moving towards EU standards;
17. Is encouraged by the fact that the Association Agreements with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia all contain articles covering the gender equality dimension and list the EU directives to which the countries should align their legislation within the next few years; underlines the value of seeing specific rights being thus entrenched in the collective *acquis* across the European continent, on issues such as equal treatment in employment and occupation, on parental leave, on encouraging improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and on matters of social security;
18. Stresses, however, that such elements are lacking from the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements the EC had negotiated with Armenia and Azerbaijan in the late nineties; welcomes the initialled EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement to be signed in November 2017 in Brussels, and the ongoing negotiations for the EU-Azerbaijan Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, and trusts that the new Agreements will include a gender-specific dimension;
19. Recalls that concrete projects aimed at empowering women and promoting gender equality are currently financed in the Eastern Partnership area through the EU's European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) and that EU regional assistance is focusing on promoting women entrepreneurship through designing national policies, supporting associations of women entrepreneurs and female-led SMEs as well as coaching and mentoring;

#### **Looking ahead: possible priorities for future action**

20. Calls on the EU and Eastern European partners to expressly recognize gender equality as fundamental common value and its achievement as a goal in their cooperation; stresses that while most of the challenges are common in nature for the EU and its partners, political impetus can help in contributing to a higher ranking of women's rights and gender equality in the Eastern Partnership political priorities;
21. Stresses that key values such as equal economic independence, equal pay for equal work

or work of equal value, equality in decision-making should thus be recognised as driving principles and common priorities; calls the Eastern European partners to consider introducing work-life balance measures in order to remove obstacles to female employment and to reduce the gender pension gap; further underlines that obsolete legal provisions which prohibit the employment of women in specific occupations should be reviewed, as they unduly restrict access of women to certain professions and work;

22. Strongly encourages all types of actions aimed at enhancing women's rights in the labour market, such as effective implementation of the existing legal framework, advancing equality between women and men, measures fostering women's entrepreneurship, awareness raising campaigns on their situation, better data collection, their assessment and monitoring to propose tailored measures as well as support for women's networks and grass roots organisation; points out that the new opportunities for women might be brought together with development of digitalisation and collaborative economy in the Eastern Partnership countries;
23. Underlines the need to formulate a gender-sensitive, rights-based policy on the basis of equality and non-discrimination, to regulate and administer and stages of migration, to facilitate access of women migrant workers to work opportunities abroad, promoting safe migration and ensuring the protection of the rights of women migrant workers; calls on the Eastern European partners to design or oversee comprehensive socio-economic, psychological and legal services aimed at facilitating the reintegration of women who have returned;
24. Considers that strengthening the role of fathers in bringing up their children can improve and facilitate work-life balance for both men and women; points out that equal take-up of leave arrangements by men and women across all categories of workers should be encouraged in order to improve women's access to and position within the labour market; stresses that child support systems, including family and child allowances, should be sufficient to ensure that women can afford to support independent households;
25. Underlines that parliamentarians, on all sides, could direct more scrutiny to gender-specific issues; this could focus on the implementation of the EU *acquis*, i.e. on ensuring that the relevant Directives are properly applied in the three associated countries to the EU (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) but also on ensuring that Members scrutinize closely the ongoing negotiations that aim at replacing the out-dated Partnership and Cooperation Agreements so as to ensure that similar provisions are included in the 'new generation' texts;
26. While gender equality is a horizontal principle within the ENP and the ENI, more precise and measurable targets should be pursued, also with regard to the new Gender Action Plan in Development 2016-2020;
27. Calls, within the reviewed ENP, for country-specific reports to focus on priorities agreed with partners, including a focus on gender equality; proposes, in order to achieve these aims, to gather harmonized data regarding the situation of women in the Eastern European partners, through the ENI and notably by the introduction of the Gender Equality Index, developed by the European Institute for Gender Equality;
28. Stresses that the EU should dedicate more energy in assisting the partners in line with

their strategies, programmes or action plans to improve the situation of women, as well as provide expertise for adjusting labour legislation on gender equality and improving women's participation in the labour market and decision-making; further insists on the urgent need for gender mainstreaming as a strategy for realizing gender equality, and for positive action in the National Action Plans of the European Neighbourhood Policy;

29. Considers that an increase in the number of women in the decision-making process, primarily at the political level, is possible by changing the political culture of the Eastern European partners and implementing the best European practices of party building;
30. Underlines the need for effective implementation of these strategies, programmes or action plans, with a motoring report being presented annually to Eastern European partners' National Parliaments and shared with the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly; encourages gender related side-events to be organized in parallel to the Eastern Partnership Summits for reasons of political visibility;
31. Calls for women's rights and gender equality issues to be systematically included in all regular political and human rights dialogues taking place, together with proposed actions;
32. Encourages the Member States to develop stronger bilateral and multilateral links with Eastern European partners and an active involvement in transitional help, technical support and experience sharing; believes that Member States in close physical proximity to the Eastern European partners could play an important role in facilitating stronger links and in involving other Member States in partnerships; highlights the important role of vocational education and training for women; encourages the increase of investment supporting female employment in quality jobs, particularly in sectors and positions where women are underrepresented;
33. Instructs its Co-Presidents to forward this resolution to the President of the European Parliament, to the Council, the Commission, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission, the EEAS, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and of the Eastern Partnership.