



EUROPEAN UNION
Delegation of the European Commission
to the United Nations

Statement by

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Delegation of the European Commission to the United Nations

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Financing for Gender Equality

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Mr Chairperson,

It is an honour and a privilege to address this session of the 52nd Commission on the Status of Women. You heard on Monday from the Presidency of the European Union on the EU's work in the area of financing for gender equality and the promotion of women's participation in peace building, conflict prevention and resolution. I would like to complement this information by providing you with some insight on the work of the European Commission in that same respect.

Since a quarter of all development aid from the EU is channelled through the European Community budget and managed by the European Commission, let me start by highlighting some significant steps we made during 2007 towards a better and more efficient financing of gender equality in development cooperation.

On 8 March last year, the European Commission adopted a Communication on "Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Development Cooperation". This policy statement, which was endorsed by EU Member States, sets the basis for a coordinated European approach for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment in development cooperation.

Through this policy document, we aim to reinforce the twin-track approach of gender mainstreaming and gender-specific actions, providing guidelines on how to make gender mainstreaming more efficient, and listing a series of gender-specific actions in five broad areas. Indeed, our past experience has shown us the importance of maintaining specific measures to promote gender equality alongside gender mainstreaming actions.

Of particular relevance to this year's priority theme, the Communication describes the different ways of promoting gender equality through the new aid modalities, budget support and sector-wide approaches, which are becoming an increasingly preferred mechanism for aid allocation. In line with the principles of partnership and ownership, set out in the Paris Declaration and in the European Consensus on development cooperation, European Community aid will be channelled increasingly through these preferred aid modalities.

Mr Chair,

The European Commission is very much aware that good policies are not enough on their own: they need to be followed up. And so we are now preparing a Planning Framework for gender-specific actions which will contain clear and measurable indicators and targets on how to meet our commitments. We intend to present this Planning Framework before the end of this year as part of a wider initiative to mainstream cross-cutting issues in development cooperation policies.

Mr Chair,

Monitoring mechanisms are a prerequisite for accountability and, for this reason, the European Commission is very much in favour of the OECD Gender Policy Marker. This instrument makes it possible to track gender equality focused aid and to monitor gender mainstreaming efforts.

Through the systematic use of the Marker, we are able to say that annually almost 35% of our development aid is spent on programmes and projects that have a positive effect on gender equality and women's empowerment. This figure provides tangible evidence of the importance the European Commission places on promoting gender equality in our partner countries via the national and regional indicative programmes.

In addition, the European Commission funds gender-specific actions through separate thematic programmes. For example, the Programme "Investing in People" will devote 57 million € over the next six years to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women in development cooperation.

The European Commission has also actively promoted gender responsive budget initiatives in recent years. I am pleased to announce that the EC and UNIFEM have just started a new initiative, allocating 2.6 M€ to support gender budgeting initiatives. The project will carry out a review of how gender responsive budget initiatives can contribute to enhancing the positive impact of the new aid modalities in support of gender equality. The purpose of the review is to present a clear case at the Accra High Level Forum in September 2008 for institutionalising the use of gender budgeting in the context of new aid modalities. Alongside this review, the project will also improve country capacity to institutionalise the application of gender budgeting.

In addition to the cooperation programmes, the European Commission is also very active in including gender equality as a policy objective in its relations with third countries. Let me give you an example.

In November 2006, a Euro Mediterranean Ministerial meeting on "Strengthening the role of women in society" took place in Istanbul. At this conference, Gender Equality ministers from the 35 partner countries adopted a set of conclusions and a five year work programme. Let me emphasise that these conclusions are based on preparatory work done in cooperation with the EuroMed civil society, showing the importance we attach to dialogue with women's organisations for the promotion of gender equality.

In Istanbul, the EU and our Mediterranean partners agreed a framework of action to strengthen the role of women in several spheres of life.

It is also worth recalling that the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plans with some with Southern Mediterranean partner countries – also containing references to the issue of promotion of women’s rights - is jointly monitored through sub-committees, including for some partner countries through dedicated sub-committees on human rights and democracy.

Mr Chair,

The European Commission is fully committed to addressing the issues of the protection of women in armed conflict and in enhancing their proactive role in peace-building, both at the policy level and through its financial instruments.

More specifically, in April 2007, the European Commission - jointly with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization (ITC-ILO) - launched the “EC/UN Partnership on Gender Equality for Development and Peace”.

This programme seeks to improve the capacity of relevant actors (national authorities, civil society, parliamentarians and journalists) in partner countries, with a specific focus on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Furthermore, we also support a non-governmental project ‘Initiative for Peace-building’ which is exploring ways to ensure the effective implementation of Resolution 1325 by the international community, governments and local civil society organisations.

In addition, the Commission is cooperating with the future EU Presidency (France) and the Member States to develop indicators for the follow up of the area of concern “Women in armed conflicts” of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Let me also mention that on 6 March, the European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, Ms Ferrero-Waldner will host a high-level conference in Brussels on ‘Women: Stabilizing an Insecure World’. The aim of this initiative is to maintain the momentum achieved by meetings of the International Women Leaders Global Security Summit and the Women Leaders Network in 2007, and to focus on the themes of security and women's empowerment.

Mr Chair,

The promotion of gender equality is one of the fundamental goals of the European Union and the European Commission seeks to promote it also in the EU’s internal policies and within its own structure. Let me conclude by give you some details of what we do.

First: financing gender equality activities in the EU

The European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity – PROGRESS - supports the effective implementation of the principle of gender equality and promotes gender mainstreaming in all Community policies. The budget for 2007-2013 is 87 million €.

Equality for women and men is also a priority objective of the Structural Funds, the main EU financial instrument to promote economic and social cohesion. Taking the example of one of the Funds, the European Social Fund, over 3500 million € were dedicated to specific gender equality activities between 2000 and 2006, in addition to gender mainstreaming activities.

Second: the gender equality structure in the Commission

Within the European Commission, we have a specific unit dealing with equality between women and men. Attached to the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, this unit performs a coordinating role for gender equality and gender mainstreaming activities in the Commission. It manages the High Level Group of Member States gender mainstreaming high level officials while, within the European Commission, it coordinates a network of gender focal points from all Commission departments. Furthermore, in the EU, we are currently setting-up a European Institute for gender equality.

Third: the development of sex-disaggregated data and statistics

The Commission, in cooperation with the EU Member States and the European Statistical office, is developing sex-disaggregated data and gender data in order to measure progress in the empowerment of women. We have also developed gender specific indicators. This requires a good deal of work and coordination but is the basis for accountability towards European citizens. Our experience shows that those developments have been facilitated by a political willingness to measure progress by using data: for example, EU Heads of State and Government have set quantitative targets for female employment rates and for childcare facilities while the gender pay gap, the elimination of poverty are high in the EU political agenda.

Fourth: Gender budgeting

Finally, a word on gender budgeting which – as has been emphasised in all our discussions here - is an important tool for analysing the allocation of budgets from a gender perspective, and for promoting gender equality.

The Commission has acknowledged the importance of gender budgeting in its Roadmap for equality between women and men and the European Parliament

has repeatedly called for a gender perspective to be included in the European Community budget process. We have launched a study to analyse the gender budgeting experiences in the Member States and international organisations and to examine the feasibility to apply gender budgeting on sections of the EC budget. The results are expected in mid-2008.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share with you part of the work of the European Commission on gender equality.