



**EUROPEAN UNION
DELEGATION TO THE UNITED
NATIONS NEW YORK**



**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC
OF HUNGARY TO THE UNITED NATIONS
NEW YORK**

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

by

**H.E. Mr. Miklós Réthelyi,
Minister for National Resources of the Republic of Hungary**

At the 55th session of the Commission on the Status of Women

General Discussion

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-
third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000:
gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”**

New York

22 February 2011

(Check against delivery)

Mr. Chair,

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

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia*, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, and Montenegro*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia align themselves with this declaration.

Mr Chair,

1. One hundred years ago, the International Women's Day was initiated in four countries. Three of those countries are now members of the European Union. That early commitment is reflected in the European Union's and its Member States ongoing support for the achievement of de facto gender equality as a fundamental right and also as an imperative for economic growth and social cohesion.

2. In the European Union we pursue these issues via the new gender equality strategy adopted by the European Commission and endorsed by EU Member States last December and in the Europe 2020 ten year strategy for jobs and growth established last year. National policies play a vital role in order to achieve these goals. Beyond the EU, with our international partners we pursue gender equality in all our work and strategies, in line with the ECOSOC Ministerial Declaration of last July which reaffirmed that gender equality is essential to economic and social development, including the achievement of all of the Millennium Development Goals.

3. The European Union citizens support measures to tackle gender inequality: in a major opinion survey in 2010, two thirds of them said that combating gender unbalance is a top priority and four-fifths want urgent action regarding the pay gap. These areas are two of the five priorities of the EU's new Gender Equality Strategy, and underpin the first priority which is equal economic independence for women and for men. The EU and its Member States underline the necessity of encompassing both women and men in the work to ensure de facto equality in society, and acknowledges that gender equality will not be achieved without the active involvement of men as partners.

4. The basis of the European Employment Strategy and the International Labour Organization's equality reports is the life cycle perspective. It considers the cumulative effects of decisions on the entire course of people's lives. As decisions taken in early life often reflect traditional gender roles and can very much affect later life, gender equality policy has the task of identifying the political measures necessary in various life phases and at transition points in people's lives allowing and furthering equal opportunities for women and men in all phases of their lives.

EU and the world

Mr Chair,

5. The establishment of a new UN entity dedicated to women's rights and gender equality and strengthening gender mainstreaming throughout the UN system should help to bolster the

* Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process

capacity of the international community to empower women, promote gender equality and counter violence against women and girls. The EU and its Member States look forward to strengthening their partnership with UN Women for the promotion of gender equality and women's rights and empowerment in all countries.

6. The promotion of gender equality and the enjoyment of human rights by women and girls are goals in their own right and are also instrumental for achieving internationally agreed development goals. The European Union affirms its strong support for and commitment to the full implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action as well as the key actions for further implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action agreed at ICPD+5, and the Copenhagen Declaration and Action Programme; and also emphasises that gender equality cannot be achieved without guaranteeing women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, and reaffirms that expanding access to sexual and reproductive health information and health services are essential for achieving the Beijing Platform for Action, the Cairo Programme for Action and the Millennium Development Goals.

7. For its part, the EU has strengthened its own capacity to act more effectively and coherently in its external action and it now has an External Action Service whose strategic objectives include the promotion of human rights. The EU is determined to ensure women's full enjoyment of their human rights in all walks of life and promotes the inclusion of a gender perspective in all policies and decisions at all levels.

8. In June 2010 the European Union adopted an EU Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development for the period 2010-2015. This Action Plan aims to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for the period 2010-2015 and to improve the EU's and its Member States work in this area so we can support our development cooperation partners' own efforts to advance gender equality in all areas including access to education, training and science by, among other actions, systematically including gender equality in the agenda of political dialogues and by mainstreaming gender issues in all areas, access to education, training and science included.

CSW themes

9. We welcome themes of this Session and in particular we are pleased with the emphasis put on the link between access to education and access to employment. Within the EU, access to education is generally assured, although early school leaving remains a concern, especially among girls from marginalised groups and ethnic minorities, as well as increasingly among boys. Sustained access to education, also known as school retention, is a priority of the Europe 2010 strategy to achieve economic growth.

10. Although in the European Union women generally have attained high levels of education, gender differences persist in terms of school and professional choices. Traditional choices in the subjects studied remain, however, a major problem and lay the basis for vertical and horizontal segregation in our labour markets. This segregation has an economic impact not least in under-utilised resources: more women than men graduate from our universities but their talents are not used and developed effectively as shows the small share of women in positions of influence. Further, women's talents are not rewarded in the same way as men's as shown by the fact that in the European Union women on average earn a fifth less than men. Labour market segregation also has a societal impact underpinning the unequal power

relations which are present in our societies and which are one of the root causes of the violence experienced by girls and women.

Education, Employment and Decent Work

Mr. Chair,

11. Education and training are essential to the development of today's knowledge society and economy. The EU and its Member States recognises that high-quality primary, secondary, higher and vocational education and training are fundamental to Europe's success. However, in a rapidly changing world; lifelong learning needs to be a priority – it is the key to employment, economic success and allows people to fully participate in society.

12. Women and girls must be encouraged to study and engage in mathematics, science and technology – disciplines which are the basis for the skills we will need even more in the future, especially to build more sustainable and greener economies. Furthermore, supporting the access of women and girls to information and communication technologies is also a key tool for women's empowerment.

13. The increasing drop-out level of boys and hence increasingly gender segregated labour markets are key challenges in the EU. Making use of women's skills and talents in all educational and economic sectors can greatly contribute to reversing the current economic crisis. The Europe 2020 Strategy to achieve an employment rate of 75% for both women and men sends an important signal that both women and men are to contribute to develop the European economies to the benefit of themselves and their societies. A high employment rate is also an important prerequisite for women's economic independence and empowerment. The Council Conclusions of 6 December 2010 committed the EU and its Member States to promote the acquisition, especially by young women, of skills required for jobs linked to the greening of the economy, in particular the so-called 'STEM' skills (science, technology, engineering and mathematics).

14. The present economic crisis gives the opportunity to meet the EU's targets for smart growth, where research and innovation play a key role, and also to address labour market challenges, particularly labour market segregation: one EU country for example is setting up a scheme to encourage men who have lost their jobs to return to work in early childhood care/education. Women's decent employment is a win-win situation for all, leading to women's empowerment as well as economic growth.

15. The European Union and its Member States are firm supporters of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda. As underlined by the 2008 ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, gender equality is a cross cutting issue for the four strategic objectives of decent work which are employment creation, rights at work, social dialogue and social protection. A rights-based approach, which includes an understanding of women's role in the informal economy and unpaid care work, is key to the effective implementation of gender equality and women's empowerment, and up-to-date ILO standards play a pivotal role in this regard.

16. Education plays a critical role in the achievement of poverty eradication and other development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, and access of women and girls to education of high quality should be ensured with the aim to equip them with the

necessary knowledge and prepare them to participate equally in decision-making in all spheres of life and at all levels.

Violence against girls and women

Mr. Chair

17. As underlined in the agreed conclusions of the 51st Session of the CSW, education, both formal and non-formal, plays an important role in combating discrimination and violence. In the context of improving girls' and women's access to education, the EU and its Member States is concerned about the fact that gender-based violence, discrimination and sexual harassment can be a key impediment to girls' and women's access to education.

18. We have worked for many years to combat violence against women, including female genital mutilation. We have provided important financial support through the Daphne Programs to the work by civil society, universities and local authorities to combat violence and support victims. We also address the issue of female genital mutilation in our relations with third countries concerned. We will continue to take strong action and develop a clear and coherent policy response to tackle violence against women and girls.

19. Combating violence against women is one of the priorities of the EU five-year "Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015. The EU Council of Ministers adopted in December 2008 the "EU Guidelines on violence against women and girls and combating all forms of discrimination against them". The adoption of guidelines demonstrates of the EU's clear political will to treat the subject of women's rights as a priority and to take long-term action in that field. Through the adoption of the guidelines the EU and its Member States have committed to raise the subject of violence against women and the discrimination from which such violence originates in its political and human rights dialogues with third countries.

20. The European Union fully supports the current discussions on the Council of Europe draft Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. It will be the first European human rights convention specifically treating the prevention of gender-based violence against women.

21. The EU and its Member States are also committed to the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325 and the subsequent Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security. In 2008, the EU adopted a Comprehensive Approach for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820, which includes commitments aimed at improving the implementation of these Resolutions by the EU. Examples of such commitments are the progress indicators regarding, inter alia, the protection and empowerment of women in conflict settings and in post-conflict situations that have been developed last year as well as the current development of training materials on gender and human rights in the context of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations. The implementation of these resolutions is closely related to the issues on the agenda during the present session of the CSW. In particular, women's participation and involvement at all levels remain critical to economic recovery in a post conflict situation, as recently again underlined by the Secretary General.

22. The tenth anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 has been a key opportunity to strengthen the global agenda on women, peace and security for the EU. One

important outcome is the recent adoption of SC Resolution 1960 (2010) on Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict creating a mechanism for compiling data on and listing perpetrators of sexual violence in armed conflict. The EU and its Member States strongly supported the creation of this mechanism and will continue its efforts in strengthening the women, peace and security agenda.

Thank you for your kind attention.

