

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT



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EU ENLARGEMENT AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR APPLICANT COUNTRIES

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Keynote speech

I am very pleased and honoured to have been invited to address this meeting of politically like-minded parliamentarians on European Enlargement and Gender Equality. I am happy to be in the land of Franz List but also the land of my dear comrades of MSZP, whom I warmly congratulate for their great victory in the recent parliamentary elections.

I would also like to thank and congratulate the organisers, especially my close friend Zita Gurmai, with whom I share and enjoy the work we do as members of the executive of S.I.W., I congratulate for having produced such a well thought through agenda with precise objectives, in anticipation of our common future. Our meeting today is very timely since the enlargement of the European Union is, with the Convention on the future of Europe, the highest political priority now, in the member states and the candidate countries, as the final phase of negotiations is coming to an end under Danish Presidency.

"As European socialists and social democrats, we are profoundly convinced that the reunification of Europe is the greatest challenge and the greatest opportunity for the European Union".

Starting with the Copenhagen summit in December 1993, our socialist group in the European Parliament has supported and promoted the enlargement of the E.U. in the East and to the South. We were the first to call for citizens of the candidate countries to have the prospect of participating in the European Elections of June 2004. We now have the historic opportunity not just to heal past divisions in Europe, but also to guarantee security, stability and prosperity in Europe.

As a political group in the European Parliament, we agree that "*We want the European Union to be more than a single market. We want it to be a Union of shared values to meet the challenges of the future*"¹.

As socialdemocrats we have not lost sight of our great objective: to build a larger community of peace, democracy, freedom, welfare and equal opportunities for all. For our political family has been decisive in defining active E.U. employment and innovation strategies promoting social progress and enhancing social security and justice.

Enlargement provides for all of us an opportunity to reform the Union, to work together, to address the issues of poverty and exclusion, to modernise the welfare state, to fight against corruption and organised crime, against human trafficking, drug trafficking, the illegal trade in arms, money laundering and terrorism.

We have to confront together the challenges of globalization, the Information Society and the maintenance of peace on our continent and elsewhere. Our political family welcomes the additional value that the new members add to the cultural diversity of the E.U. Respect of multiculturalism is essential and beneficial to us all. While preserving our different identities, we must recognise our wider interests and identity as Europeans. The E.U. can only foster democracy, political and economic progress if it remains stable and develops a stronger political identity. Regional cohesion, social dialogue, sustainable development, full employment and gender equality must remain at the core of our policy in an enlarged E.U.

In this new political and geographical context women have an important and positive role to play. The European Parliament Committee for the Rights of Women and Equal Opportunities, which I have the privilege to chair is a crucial locus for the debate on gender issues, to enact and monitor legislation, as well as to promote new initiatives and ideas to comply with the provisions of the Treaty concerning gender equality.

We have more particularly tried with the very useful contribution of experts and women politicians from the candidate countries, to assess the extent to which the accession to EU would influence positively the social, political and professional life of women. At the beginning of last week, we held a very rich and instructive public hearing in Brussels. "Is Enlargement also for women?" was the question to participants and we successively discussed the legislation, the socio-economic situation of women and the next European Elections.

Gender inequalities are not only specific to countries in line of accession to the EU but are also present in the EU Member States. This is the reason why we must constantly rethink policies where women's roles are often neglected and also further develop policies to address the problems.

¹ in the position paper adopted by the PES group on the enlargement of the EU

In recent years, specific legislative instruments, i.e. the Treaty of Amsterdam and directives designed to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and men which have been adopted at the EU level and which form part of the "Community acquis", constitute a considerable achievement for Europe. In this respect, the process of enlargement of the EU represents an excellent opportunity for the candidate countries to share this achievement and promote gender equality objectives in all spheres of life.

Furthermore, this is a real necessity, in order to respond to the developments in some of the candidate countries, where inequalities between women and men have, in many areas, become more severe during the transition to a free market economy. Mainly countries from Central and Eastern Europe have seen a deterioration of the situation of women in many respects: unemployment and gender pay gaps have grown, childcare facilities have been scaled down and the number of women in decision-making positions has declined. In this respect, not only adoption but also adequate implementation of the "Community acquis" before accession to the EU is vital for ensuring gender equality and must be seen as a priority in the accession process.

In its Opinion on 22 April 2002, on the state of enlargement negotiations, our Committee has emphasised that "***adoption of the "Community acquis" in the area of gender equality is a condition sine qua non for accession, since it is essentially a question of human rights***". The position of the PES group is also to place the adoption of the acquis communautaire as an essential precondition for accession, adding, "***we want gender mainstreaming to be implemented***".

Our committee added that "***the necessary institution building or reinforcement of institutional and administrative capacity in this area is a vital prerequisite to full implementation of the "acquis"***" and stressed that the candidate countries should ***ensure full and effective implementation of the "acquis", as regards gender equality, before accession***. In this context, we have insisted that the European Union should promote and support, with financial and human resources, the candidate countries in the work to efficiently implement the "acquis" on gender equality by, among others, an increased use of the Phare programme and pre-accession funds to build institutions.

In the coming months, we will be particularly attentive to the proportion of funds from EU sources devoted to projects which, in line with art.3 of the Amsterdam treaty "promote gender equality and eliminate inequalities between women and men". This is in my view one of the issues we should address together as our governments are still in "their honeymoon period"¹.

We know that a number of candidate countries have made a considerable progress on gender equality in terms of their legislation and institutional framework, but there is still a need for further effort to promote the economic, social and political equality of women. Having regard to the negative effects of the transition process for many candidate countries, we can point out that women are the first victims of budget cuts in provision of childcare facilities, education and in social protection systems that underpin the reconciliation of work and private life. Nevertheless, we know that the majority of women of candidate

¹ this colourful expression was used by an Hungarian gender equality expert in a recent meeting

countries wish to combine work with family life. In this respect, there is specific need, beside the "Community acquis", to safeguard and improve the provision of childcare facilities and other social services necessary for reconciling work and private life for women and men.

Furthermore, other issues of particular concern, which most, if not all, candidate countries share, are trafficking of women and sexual exploitation, prostitution, under-age prostitution and child pornography, as well as domestic violence. In its above mentioned opinion of 22 April 2002, our committee ***"called on the European Commission, in co-operation with Member States and the candidate countries, to take effective measures to promote networks and partnerships between the police, judicial, migration and social authorities, as well as between NGO's and international organisations"***.

On the other hand, our committee urged the Commission to ***"reinforce the efforts to eradicate all forms of violence, as a part of its accession strategy to ensure respect of women's human rights"***. In this respect, I wish to inform you that our committee will be consulted very soon on a Commission's proposal for a new legislative instrument to fight gender discriminations in all spheres of life, in line with article 13 of the Treaty.

In its Opinion, our committee called for enhanced co-operation between the EU and the candidate countries, with the aim of improving legislation against violence against women and increasing the measures to protect victims, including strengthened co-operation with NGO's. We have also strongly requested that the candidate countries should be encouraged to take part in Community programmes¹ and that women should be better informed about their rights.

The position of the PES group is again, totally in line with the need to combat trafficking. Let me quote: ***"The effective implementation of measures against trafficking in women and domestic violence against women must be at the heart of the enlargement process and must be continued in the enlargement of the EU"***

The last but most important subject of concern to us is the participation of women at all stages of the decision-making process and more particularly in the elections to the European Parliament in 2004. This was raised both by our committee on a number of occasions and by our political group, I quote again: ***"the governments of the candidate countries should promote the equal participation of women and men in the decision making process as foreseen in the Council recommendation of 2 December 1996"***.

The phenomenon of the low representation of women in decision-making positions in all spheres of political and professional life is common to the current Member States of the EU and the candidate countries. As an illustration, let me mention the weak representation of women in the recently created Convention on the future of Europe. I find this unbalanced composition a very worrying symbol, as

¹ again we will be very attentive at requests to participate in gender specific programmes like the Framework equality programme, Daphne, women and science.

equality of women and men is a prerequisite for the building of a democratic Europe. However, it is worthwhile mentioning that considerable progress has been made during the 1990's by the European Union. From 1991 to 1999 the number of women increased from 19% to 31% in the European Parliament, from 10% to 25% in the European Commission and from 11% to 23% in the Member States governments. Our priority concern and our aim should be to have a common electorate system and to ensure a gender balance in the European Parliament.

To conclude, I wish to recall what I consider as the most important issues for our common gender equality agenda and, for our future "shared framework to ensure that gender equality becomes an integral part of political action by socialists and social democratic MP's".

First, "money speaks louder than words": we must ensure that decent proportions of the public funds for enlargement are allotted to the promotion of gender equality and the elimination of inequalities. A number of democratic states are developing gendered evaluations of their national budget and we are ourselves in the European institutions looking into the matter. Enlargement is important enough to serve as a test case for a deepening of democracy.

Second, violence and trafficking are gender issues: women and men are not subject to violence and trafficking in the same way. For historical reasons, the breach of women's rights has very lately come about as a political issue of great concerns in the European Union and worldwide. We must have a consistent and progressive agenda on combating all forms of violence against women.

Third, a political agenda which places gender equality as a priority is credible only with an equal representation of women and men in decision making positions. For political parties, zip lists, quotas are some of the means used to increase the proportion of elected women and move towards parity democracy. The low representation of women in the Convention as well as some recent elections show that there is no "natural" movement towards an equalisation of the numbers of women and men in positions of power. It resorts from a political will. Our parties should be exemplary in this respect.

Fourth, the visibility of women and gender issues has become even more essential in the enlargement process that the very conception of equality is not understood in the same way everywhere. Women's experience has been very different in post communist countries and in Western Europe. If gender equality policies are to be successful, this must be both researched and debated.

As a final note, I am convinced as a woman, as a European and as a socialist that equality is not a luxury, it is a necessity, not only for the labour market (Dasa Silovic develops a convincing picture of the influence of demographic trends on the labour force) but to promote a better understanding of public policies, of conflicts and their resolution, of sustainable development of the aspirations of people and their fears in a globalised and complex world.