



Meeting of the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

26 November 2015

Draft Minutes

Welcome and introduction

The chair, Ms **Waltraud Dahs** (DE), was unable to attend the meeting due to health reasons. Since the vice-chairs were also not present at the meeting, Ms **Isabelle Wickler** - from the Luxembourgish Ministry for Equal Opportunities and representing the Luxembourgish Presidency - took over the role of chair and opened the meeting.

The chair informed the audience that all the relevant documents for the meeting were to be found in the handed-out compendium.

1. Adoption of the draft agenda

The draft agenda was adopted.

2. Adoption of the draft minutes of the meeting of 21 May 2015

The draft minutes were adopted.

3. Information from the Commission on recent developments in gender equality in the EU

The chair welcomed the Commission's Equality Director, **Salla Saastamoinen**, and the Head of the Gender Equality Unit in DG JUST, **Daniela Bankier**, and invited them as well as other colleagues from the Gender Equality Unit to give information on recent developments in the area of gender equality.

Additional information was provided for each of the following subjects:

1. Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019
2. Work-life balance "fresh-start"
3. Women on boards (WOB)
4. EU-2020
5. Equal Pay
6. Violence against women (VAW)
7. Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

8. Mutual Learning Programme in gender equality
9. Calls for proposal: state-of-play

Questions and comments included:

France, ETUC and the **EWL** inquired about the exact status of the new "Strategic engagement", its duration and to what extent the Commission could be held accountable for this document.

Salla Saastamoinen clarified that the "Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019" would be issued in the form of a Commission staff working document and that it would be sent to the Council Presidency, with copies to the Member States, with a letter having undergone Commission collegial approval on 4 December just before EPSCO Council of 7 December.

Salla Saastamoinen added that the "Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019" is to cover 4 years as to align it with the length of the mandate of the current European Commission. The document clearly spells out objectives to be achieved, actions, timings and indicators against which progress will be monitored for each one of the five thematic priority areas. Moreover, the Commission will continue to issue an annual report on progress in achieving gender equality in the EU.

Sweden did not hide its disappointment on what it considers to be a downgrading of gender equality policy by the Commission when compared with past practice.

Questions on the state-of-play of the negotiations of the Women on Boards proposal (point 3. above) and on work-life balance (point 2.) were put forward by **CEC, ETUC** and **Eurocadres**.

On Women on Boards, Salla Saastamoinen explained that the proposal continues to be a priority for the European Commission. Salla highlighted the increased flexibility for member states in the proposal and thanked the LU Presidency for its efforts in trying to identify a compromise that would ensure a common approach at the forthcoming December EPSCO of 7 December. Both CEC and ETUC openly asked about "who is blocking". Salla Saastamoinen recognised that there is a blocking minority on this file, but added that the Commission was clearly not in a position to disclose what could be considered as sensitive information on the negotiations.

On work-life balance "fresh-start" (point 2.), Daniela Bankier confirmed to Eurocadres that due attention is to be given to incentivising a higher take-up of parental leave by fathers and supporting the re-integration of mothers back into the workplace at the end of their maternity leave. Daniela Bankier also recalled the timings of the consultation process for this file and reassured the audience of the Commission's intention to request a specific ad-hoc Advisory Committee opinion on work-life balance in the very beginning of 2016. The Advisory Committee will thus be consulted and have an important role to play in this process.

On Violence against women (point 6.), the **EWL** asked about what was being done by the Commission regarding enforcement of sexual harassment provisions in equal treatment legislation and how it will further pursue it in the future:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:204:0023:0036:en:PDF>

Salla Saastamoinen confirmed that the Commission monitors this issue at regular intervals: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/your_rights/gender_equality_law_33_countries_how_transposed_2013_en.pdf

Salla added that EUROFOUND has just published the latest results of their EU-wide survey on Working Conditions (<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/2015/sixth-european-working-conditions-survey-2015>), which include sex-disaggregated information on harassment and violence at work.

France inquired about Commission's intentions regarding the ratification of Istanbul Convention. Emilie Jarrett confirmed the readiness of the Commission to propose the conclusion of this Convention by the EU (*id est*, signature and ratification) to the extent of its competences, alongside the ratification by Member States in order to improve women's lives, health and safety. **France** also informed of the possibility for the Commission to take part in the meetings of the Committee of the Parties of the Istanbul Convention as an observer. In this regard, the Commission was indeed represented at the subsequent meeting in December.

The **EIGE** provided some details on the launch of the “White Ribbon Campaign” -joint initiative with the Luxembourgish Presidency, 25 November 2015 in Luxembourg- to commemorate the International day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The White Ribbon Campaign is the world's biggest campaign engaging men in fighting violence against women. EIGE also informed the audience about EIGE's recently launched analysis of the Victims' Rights Directive from a gender perspective. Direct link to the full report: <http://eige.europa.eu/rdc/eige-publications/analysis-victims-rights-directive-gender-perspective>

The **EWL** then took the floor to briefly present the activities of its Observatory on Violence against Women: <http://www.womenlobby.org/-ewl-observatory-on-violence-?lang=en>. EWL added that it considered the recently launched infographic on the Gender Pay Gap, developed by the Commission, to be a very good tool to raise awareness of the issue. The launch of the infographic also marked European Equal Pay Day: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-pay-gap/index_en.htm

The **European Commission** and **UN Women** informed the Advisory Committee about the preparations for the next Commission on the Status of Women to be held in New York, 14-24 March 2016 (point 7). In order to ensure that a common ambition and commitment to gender equality is matched with equally ambitious means of implementation, a solid and effective follow-up and review of the 2030 agenda will be crucial to monitor and assess progress towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. The UN Secretary-General is to present a report on the system of follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda at the beginning of 2016.

The **EWL** added that it co-wrote a civil society open letter to First Vice-President Frans Timmermans on the 2030 agenda and asked the Commission how it intended to further pursue gender mainstreaming and to integrate a gender equality perspective into different EU policies. Salla Saastamoinen answered that the Commission will continue to gender mainstream by incorporating gender equality considerations in impact assessments and evaluations in line with the better regulation principles and that in the new strategic engagement there is a separate section on gender mainstreaming.

UN Women shared useful information about COP 21/Paris and COP 22 to take place next year in Morocco. Materials on this can be found [Media Advisory](#) and under:

<http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/climate-change>

4. Information from current and future Presidencies

Ms Isabelle Wickler informed the AC on the main Gender Equality activities organised by the **LU Presidency**:

17 July 2015 **Ministers for Gender Equality and Employment discussed the need to achieve greater equality between men and women in employment at the informal EPSCO Council, Luxembourg**

Ministers for Gender Equality and Employment exchanged strategies to better meet the needs of men and women for greater balance between work and family life. There was an open-minded discussion about the link between employment and equal opportunities and the need to foster a holistic and multidisciplinary approach. The LU Minister for Equal Opportunities, Lydia Mutsch, pointed out that these discussions had made it possible to focus on a new division of responsibilities between men and women in professional, private and family life bringing society further in terms of social justice and equality. According to the LU Minister of Labour, Nicolas Schmit, increased equality will benefit the labour market, the economy and companies. The Minister was especially sensitive to the important role men should have to play in this context.

Marianne Thyssen, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, explained that the European Commission is "committed" to supporting the integration of women into the labour market as a "necessity for both society and the economy". Ms Thyssen also announced that the European Commission will present a proposal for a revised directive on maternity leave, as it has withdrawn its earlier proposal from 2008.

<http://www.eu2015lu.eu/en/actualites/articles-actualite/2015/07/info-epsco-femmes/index.html>

17-18 October 2015 **International conference on gender equality in political and economic decision-making**

The Ministry of Equal Opportunities, in cooperation with the National Council of Women of Luxembourg (CNFL), organized a major international conference with the participation of renowned national and international experts to deliberate on various strategies to promote the participation of women in economic and political decision-making. Besides presentations and speeches, every conference day was rounded up by a round table discussion with stakeholders and experts enriching the high-leveled event with "bottom up" input.

The first day was dedicated to political and the second to economic decision making. Minister Lydia Mutsch highlighted the importance of "collective awareness that something should change". In particular, the Minister pointed out that a quota of 40 % (for each gender) will now be introduced on the lists to be presented by political parties for next LU national legislative elections and for European elections.

EIGE's Director, Virginija Langbakk, confirmed that progress had been made within boards of directors, and that this was also due to major debates on the introduction of quotas in EU member states.

Guest speaker Heiko Maas, German Federal Minister of Justice, presented the reasons which drove the German government to propose a law introducing a quota of 30% of women in executive positions in large companies. For Mr Maas, quotas are a "matter of justice", but also a matter of "good economic sense" in view of Germany's demographic development. "Quotas will render quotas useless, because having women in executive positions will become something

quite natural", the Minister insisted. Lydia Mutsch, the LU Minister for Equal Opportunities, concluded the conference day on the need for raising awareness and for committed and motivated companies. Read more on: <http://www.eu2015lu.eu/en/actualites/articles-actualite/2015/10/16-conf-mega/index.html>

29-30 October 2015 International Conference on individualization of income taxation and the participation of women in the workplace organized by the LU Minister of Labour, Nicolas Schmit, and supported by the LU Minister for Equal Opportunities, Lydia Mutsch

What is the impact of individual taxation on female employment in Europe and in the context of Agenda 2020? At this two-day conference, European experts in the field of tax and social policy gave updated presentations on individual taxation and the degree of individualization in Member States. There was a passionate debate between experts and the audience going very deeply into all the possible issues around traditional systems based on marital status and linked to gendered divisions of male/female roles, which lead to gender inequalities and discrimination.

Guest speaker Salla Saastamoinen, Director for Equality at the European Commission's DG Justice and Consumers, explained that the issue of "neutrality between the sexes" in tax systems is nothing new and that the Commission already published a report to persuade Member States to switch to an individual taxation system in 1985.

Lydia Mutsch pointed out that, given the emergence of new lifestyles and the diversity of households and society as a whole, it is time to "call into question the legal taxation framework that is based on marriage as a stable institution and on the principle of a single breadwinner per household". This system - which the LU Minister believes is counterproductive to the extent that it discriminates, at least indirectly, against married women- "risks penalizing married women who carry out a paid activity, particularly if their income is less than that of their spouse". Read more on: <http://www.eu2015lu.eu/en/actualites/articles-actualite/2015/10/29-conf-imposition-indiv-experts/index.html>

25 November 2015 International day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

Both EIGE and the LU Ministry of Equal Opportunities launched the "White Ribbon Campaign" in Luxembourg. Elimination of violence against women remains a topic that the LU Ministry takes very seriously. The White Ribbon Campaign is the world's biggest campaign engaging men in fighting violence against women. Men wearing the white ribbon declare that they will never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women. They also promise to raise the issue of violence against women and to work with whatever means possible towards ending it.

The upcoming **Dutch Presidency** (1st semester 2016) gave a general outline of its upcoming activities:

- The Dutch Presidency hopes to achieve concrete progress on the five primary objectives of the strategic agenda, as laid down by the European Council in June 2014. In addition to this, Dutch government wants to focus on innovative growth and jobs; on key priorities for the EU; and to foster connection with society.
- The Netherlands will organise various informal meetings in Amsterdam. Meetings of ministers will be held in the National Maritime Museum in Amsterdam. Meetings at official level will take place at Marineterrein, the former navy base in Amsterdam.

- To ensure continued cooperation between Member States and the European Commission, the Gender Equality and LGBTI Equality Department of the NL Ministry of Education, Culture and Science will host a meeting of the **High Level Group on Gender Mainstreaming in Amsterdam, 21-22 January 2016**.
- The Dutch Presidency also looks forward to the expected follow up of the strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019.
- At the global level, the Dutch Presidency will, in close cooperation with the European External Action Service (EEAS), ensure a strong EU commitment at the **60th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)**.
- The Netherlands Presidency will support, in close coordination, the HR/VP (High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs & Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission) in ensuring a strong EU commitment on the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

The future **Slovak Presidency** (2nd semester 2016) also provided a general outline of its upcoming activities:

- **Council Conclusions on indicators for monitoring the Beijing Platform and EIGE report**
In cooperation with EIGE, the Slovak Presidency shall review the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States in the Area of “Women and Poverty” (covered in 2007 by Portugal). Attention will be given to the negative effects that influence women’s lives, their working conditions, and their place in the society. Emphasis will be placed on the situation of the most disadvantaged groups of women and the various factors further contributing to their situation (age, immigration status, single parent situation, disability, ethnicity, in particular Roma ...), and including the evaluation of the possible impact of the economic crisis on women’s poverty.
- A meeting of the **High Level Group on Gender Mainstreaming will be hosted in Bratislava, 7-8 September 2016**, aiming at ensuring effective cooperation between Member States and the European Commission.
- Balanced work and private life is a prerequisite for higher participation of women in the labour market as well as their economic independence; an **expert conference** will therefore be held in Bratislava. The conference will be dedicated to the **reconciliation of work and family life in a changing society** (date tbc).

5. Presentation of the opinions of the Advisory Committee

5.a) Opinion on "Gender Equality and the Digital Society in Europe: opportunities and risks"

Presentation of the Advisory Committee opinion on "*Gender Equality and the Digital Society in Europe: opportunities and risks*" by **Ms Isabelle Wickler**, chair of the Working Group (WG).

The opinion reflects on concrete steps to fully take advantage of the digital opportunities available to girls and women in Europe; it also addresses issues related to how to tackle the risks that come along with the rise of new technologies (e.g. cyber violence). The full text of the

adopted opinion is online. Please refer to: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/other-institutions/advisory-comittee/index_en.htm

5.b) Opinion on "How to overcome occupational segregation?"

Presentation of the Advisory Committee opinion on "*How to overcome occupational segregation?*" by the chair of the Working Group (WG), **Mr Christian Hoenisch**, from the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth.

The opinion puts forward insightful recommendations on how to tackle gender occupational segregation: by taking stock of successful experiences at national or sectoral level, by highlighting the relevant stakeholders at all levels and by sketching out possible actions at EU level. The full text of the adopted opinion is online: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/other-institutions/advisory-comittee/index_en.htm

6. Presentation of "Attitudes towards Violence against Women" report

Both Professor Gracia and Professor Lila from the **European network of experts in gender equality** (ENEGE) presented their recently published report on "Attitudes towards Violence against Women". The report concludes that research on this topic is underdeveloped and a major limitation of working in this field is that (few) existing surveys do not provide comparable data across the EU.

There is a clear lack of data based on common content criteria and standardized methodologies at EU level. Preliminary results show that attitudes of acceptability and tolerance towards violence against women as well as gender stereotypes and sexist attitudes remain quite prevalent in some sectors of the society; victim-blaming attitudes are still widespread; the public in general has little knowledge about services or resources for victims; non-intervention attitudes are prevalent.

Both ENEGE experts and the audience concluded that violence against women is pervasive and that massive public education in this area is needed. The worrisome results presented should be further analysed and monitored in future surveys and studies.

The full text of the report is online: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-violence/index_en.htm

7. Discussion and adoption of the 2016 Work Programme

Daniela Bankier presented the proposed themes for opinions to be prepared in 2016. A note on this had been circulated to all members and observers prior to the meeting.

The Advisory Committee agreed to prepare the following two opinions in 2016:

- Gender mainstreaming in the European Migration Agenda
- Taking stock of 2013 Commission's Communication towards the elimination of female genital mutilation and on its possible follow-up

A few members have already stepped forward to take part in the working groups; more are expected to follow after liaising with their respective services/hierarchy.

8. Any other business (AOB)

According to Article 6 of the Commission Decision of 16 June 2008 relating to the setting-up of the Advisory Committee (AC), a chair and two vice-chairs have to be confirmed for 2016.

Marusa Gortnar/Slovenia (1st vice-chair in 2015) is to become chair of the AC in 2016. Jacqueline Niavarani/Austria is to become 1st vice-chair. The AC also decided to elect Mercedes Alicia Fernandez Perez/Spain as 2nd vice-chair for 2016. These decisions were warmly welcomed by the members of the Committee.

The chair thanked the Committee for the constructive meeting and, not least for having travelled to Brussels under exceptional security measures. Daniela Bankier also thanked the chairs of the two 2015 Working Groups- Ms Isabelle Wickler and Ms Christian Hoenisch- for their valuable work.

The next AC meeting is in principle to take place on 26 May 2016.