



EUROPEAN WOMEN'S
LOBBY
EUROPEEN DES FEMMES

Brussels, 10/4/2014

To Commissioner Olli Rehn
Commissioner responsible for Economic and Monetary Affairs
Commission Vice-President

Re: Economic governance - the need for stronger gender equality country-specific recommendations

Dear Commissioner Rehn,

The European Women's Lobby (EWL), the largest coalition of women's non-governmental organisations in the EU has been closely following the European Semester over the past three years. Our member organisations have developed proposals for country-specific recommendations that take into account the situation of women in the Member States.

The European Women's Lobby welcomes the fact that the Commission requires Member States to increase the accessibility and affordability of childcare services, and the EWL requests Member States to immediately turn these recommendations into action. While the EWL acknowledges that the Commission pays specific attention to women's low employment rate (63% compared to 75% for men¹), subsequently, the Commission considers the low availability of childcare facilities as the main barrier to women's employment.

However, the Commission's recommendations do not pay enough attention to the **low quality of women's jobs** that remain in **gender segregated** framework coupled with **low pay, persistent gender pay gap** and **high-levels of part-time work** in most EU Member States. These factors contribute to high **gender pension gaps** and higher levels of **poverty** among women.

In 2014, the EWL invites you to issue country-specific recommendations to all Member States, calling on them to close the **gender pay gap** and to integrate a gender equality perspective in reforms to their **pension systems**.

The **gender pay gap** stands at an average **16%** in the EU and is a problem across the whole of the EU Member States, and the average **gender pension gap** is twice this level at **39%**². However, the Commission only mentions the gender pay gap and, in 2013, the gender pension gap in its recommendation to Austria (pay gap 23%, pension gap 34%³). The pay gap is higher than 20% also in Estonia (30%), the Czech Republic (22%), Germany (22%), Hungary (20%), and Slovakia (22%)⁴.

Recommendations that call on Member States to **align the retirement ages of women and men**, fail to address gender equality by calling on Member States to ensure that the outcome of such policies should address **gender inequalities in pension systems**. Aligning women and men's effective retirement age will not on its own remedy the huge gender disparities in pensions⁵.

¹ European Commission, *Boosting equality between women and men in the EU, Key actions and figures*, March 2014

² idem

³ European Commission, *The gender gap in pensions in Europe*, 2013

⁴ European Commission, *Boosting equality between women and men in the EU, Key actions and figures*, March 2014

⁵ See European Commission, *The gender gap in pensions in Europe*, 2013



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More notably, recommendations that refer to “**second earners**”, which primarily concern women in light of their high representation in part-time work (31.9%, compared to 8.4% for men), could have the negative effect of perpetuating traditional gender roles which maintain women in a secondary position jeopardising their own economic independence. The EWL invites you to recommend to Member States **to shift from joint taxation to individualised taxation**, similar to the country-specific recommendation issued to Germany in 2011. The EWL believes that individualised taxation will also help to address fiscal disincentives which prevent ‘second earners’ (mainly women) from participating in the labour-market.

The European Women Lobby also recalls that the *European Pact on Gender Equality*⁶ adopted in 2011 provides *the basis to strengthen the gender equality dimension of the country-specific recommendations, and the whole European semester* as well as the *Annual Growth Survey*.

In the future the EWL recommends that equality between women and men is incorporated in the country specific recommendations in a more systematic manner, notably:

- In its assessment and recommendations the Commission must look beyond the female employment rate and pay more attention to gender inequalities in the labour market and the way these are linked to gender inequalities at home (for example, strengthening measures and monitoring the obstacles to men’s take-up rate of parental leave).
- More attention needs to be paid to specific groups of women such as migrant, disabled, older women and single parents (notwithstanding the fact that some of these groups are referenced in some national recommendations).
- The country-specific recommendations themselves should be gender mainstreamed. The recommendations made to increase women’s employment rate by increasing child care may be undermined by other recommendations, for example ones that require the Member States to provide fiscal disincentives for ‘second earners’, reduction of public sector spending where women are the majority of public sector workers and welfare recipients; cuts in public sector services may also transfer services such as care back to women.

We trust that you will give your utmost attention to these issues to ensure that gender equality becomes a cornerstone of the European semester and the EU2020 Strategy.

Yours sincerely,

Pierrette Pape
Interim Co-ordinator

Viviane Teitelbaum
President

c.c. Ms Catherine Day, European Commission Secretary General
Ms Outi Slotboom, Head of Unit, DG Economic and Financial Affairs
Ms Daniela Bankier, Acting Director, Equality DG Justice

⁶ Council of the European Union, Council conclusions on the European Pact for gender equality for the period 2011 – 2020, 7 March 2011