



DELEGATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TO THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

**Speech by the Ambassador Aurélia Bouchez,
Head of the European Union Delegation to Kazakhstan
at Global Women's Congress
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Panel session: “Social Modernization of Society - Policies on Improving the Quality of Life”

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Let me begin by saying that it is a great pleasure and privilege for me to attend the Global Women's Congress today and to speak on the role of women with regard to social modernisation and improved quality of life. I would like to express my appreciation to the organisers of this conference for this excellent initiative. The topic of our discussion here today is certainly of key importance as equality between women and men is one of the fundamental principles of the EU.

Equality is one of five values on which the Union is founded. The Union is bound to strive for equality between women and men in all its activities, as confirmed in the Treaty on European Union. This Treaty provides that EU *"values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail"* (Articles 2 and 3 TEU).

It is equally the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights that provides for such equality and prohibits sex discrimination. It confirms that *"equality between men and women must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay"* (OJ C 303, 14.12.2007, p. 1, Article 23, Equality between men and women).

This noted, the European Union's objectives on gender equality are to ensure equal opportunities and equal treatment for men and women and to combat any form of discrimination on the grounds of gender. The EU has adopted a two-pronged approach to this issue, combining specific measures with gender mainstreaming. The issue also has a strong international dimension with regard to the fight against poverty, access to education and health services, taking part in the economy and in the decision-making process, women's rights and human rights.

The EU gender equality strategy adopted 21 September 2010 spells out a series of actions based around five priorities: equal economic independence; equal pay for equal work and work of equal value; equality in decision-making; dignity, integrity and an end to gender-based violence; gender equality in external actions.

As outlined in this strategy, in the EU the increased participation of women on the labour market during the last decade has contributed to economic growth and equal economic independence. In other terms, getting more women on to the labour market helped to widen

the human capital base and raise competitiveness of the EU economies, which is precisely why the topic of our meeting is so relevant for the discussions at the Astana Economic Forum this week.

It is furthermore the EU's Concerted Strategy for Modernising Social Protection, that, with a view to reconciling work and family life, emphasises the importance for both men's and women's participation in employment of adequate support for childcare, including policies on career breaks, parental leave, part-timework and flexible working arrangements.

As spelled out in this strategy, social protection should contribute to reconciling work and family life: support for families and for the possibility to reconcile work and family life is not only a question of equal opportunities for women and men, but also an economic necessity in the light of demographic and societal changes.

The strategy puts forward the following objectives: make work pay and provide secure income; make pensions safe and pension systems sustainable; promote social integration; and ensure high quality and sustainability of health care.

The role of women for growth and social modernisation is also included in the EU 2020 strategy. The Strategy attributes an important role to women, and the EU recognises that women's entrepreneurial potential constitutes an underexploited source of growth. Amongst other things, a Directive on equal treatment for the self-employed has been adopted by the EU, which allows Member States to adopt further positive action measures. The EU's Small Business Act refers at several points to women, and sees a need to foster entrepreneurial interest and talent for women.

Concrete initiatives taken by the EU for the broader public:

Data accumulation and evaluation: the EU launched the *European Network to Promote Women's Entrepreneurship* to evaluate support measures for female entrepreneurs in different EU countries.

Information and education: the EU opened a *Women's Entrepreneurship Portal* to provide information across the EU and proposed a funding instrument for the current Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme in addition to the principal focus on promoting entrepreneurship for women.

Opening of networks: to provide EU women with inspirational models, the *European Network of Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors* and the *Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs* were set up.

Improved access to capital: The European Social Fund provides targeted support to women entrepreneurs.

The EU incorporates gender related policies in its external policies, as can be best illustrated on the example of the EU – Kazakhstan cooperation.

The EU has adopted local EU strategy for the implementation of EU guidelines on violence against women and girls and combating all forms of discrimination against them. The women situation in Kazakhstan is followed on the occasion of the EU local (Delegation and

Embassies) meetings on Human Rights and during the meetings of the EU Delegation with local NGOs. Moreover, the EU-CA civil society seminar in 2010 was dedicated entirely on Women's rights.

Let me have a quick look on EU activities in the area of gender policy in Kazakhstan. In the period 2004-2012, EU Delegation implemented a number of projects focused on variety of issues, including related to women rights education; women and children's health, domestic violence and awareness raising of state authorities, NGOs and general public and access to justice for women. The most recent projects related to the following issues: SMEs and mother's and children's health.

1) Strengthening Tourism sector enhancing Business Intermediary Organizations capacity to assist tourism (2011-2012, € 484,679.00, *CA Regional project*). The project is focused on enabling Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan *to develop a network of qualified, environmentally-friendly tourism Small and Medium-Enterprises (SMEs) focusing on the participation of businesswomen*. The development of small-scale private tourism enterprises, women based, should make this sector more competitive in both regions. The main activities included exchange of experience and best practice, study visits to the EU partners and training of BIO's staff to enhance capacity of CA Chambers of Commerce in tools and methods to assist qualified tourist SMEs, with special focus on Women Entrepreneurs.

2) "Support for Maternal and Child Health in Kazakhstan" run for two years with a budget of 1,199,916.00 EURO was successfully completed to be implemented by WHO in partnership with the Ministry of Health of Kazakhstan with the aim to improve the health.

These two examples show that the EU seeks through its cooperation with Kazakhstan to contribute to the social modernisation and improved quality of life by addressing the situation of women in the various walks of life: be it at home or in business.

Let me conclude by expressing appreciation for the attention paid by Kazakhstan to the improvement of the situation of women and the quality of our cooperation with Kazakhstan in this field too. I look forward to further cooperation with my Kazakhstani colleagues to support the women of Kazakhstan and the fruitful discussion on the role women in fulfilling the set objectives.

Thank you very much for your attention.