



EUROPEAN UNION

Delegation of the European Union

Skopje, 11 January 2013

**Closure event of EIDHR funded project:
“Achieving Gender Equality in Rural Communities”
(EU InfoCentre)**

Speech by
H.E. Mr Aivo ORAV
Head of EU Delegation

**Dear Ms. Grozdanova, Dear Mayors,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is with great pleasure that we host today's event marking the successful closure of this EU-funded project aimed to enhance gender equality in rural communities.

Achieving gender equality is one of the European Union's founding values and, therefore, lies at the heart of the EU Acquis. It goes back to 1957 when the principle of equal pay for equal work became part of the Treaty of Rome.

Furthermore, in the Lisbon Treaty, the European Union defines itself as ***"a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail"***.

Over the last decades, the EU has made significant progress in achieving equality between women and men. This is mainly thanks to equal treatment legislation, gender mainstreaming and specific measures for the advancement of women.

The **EU Strategy for equality between women and men** represents the European Commission's work program on gender equality for the period 2010-2015. It is a comprehensive framework committing the Commission to promote gender equality and women's empowerment into all its policies.

Even more, the Strategy highlights the contribution of gender equality to economic growth and sustainable development, and supports the implementation of the gender equality dimension in the "Europe 2020 Strategy".

With reference to this process in the country, we welcomed the enactment of the **Law on Equal Opportunities on Women and Men** adopted last year. However, the last year's Progress Report highlights that (quote): "...**women's rights and gender equality**, discriminatory customs, traditions and stereotypes are widespread and undermine women's basic rights, especially those of women in rural areas. Active participation by women in political life remains low, particularly at local level... Institutions do not appropriately exercise their role in ensuring better integration of the gender perspective into other policy areas."

A lot remains to be done to remove the obstacles which prevent full participation of women in the society. Therefore, more actions on promotion of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment are needed.

This project, funded under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, is an excellent example of successful action that enhanced gender equality in rural communities through institutionalising a gender mainstreaming approach in policy making.

Women in the rural communities are key agents of change and are pivotal for development of the rural areas. It is crucial that their contributions are empowered and recognised and their voices are included in the decision making processes at all levels of government.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of mayors from the municipalities of Bogovinje, Brvenica, Zelino and Vrapcishte, as well as the Municipal Gender Equality Commissions, for creating and adopting the Local Gender Equality Action Plans. I am confident that their will contribute to our joint goal: a more "gender equal" society.

I would like to thank all involved in the project, particularly the project implementing organisation Association for Local Rural Development from Tetovo and their partners, for their good work!

Thank you.