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**EUROMED WOMEN'S CONFERENCE**  
**BARCELONA +10**  
**24-25 November 2005**

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## COMMISSIONER BENITA FERRERO-WALDNER URGES WOMEN TO PROMOTE THEIR RIGHTS

European Commissioner for External Relations and the European Neighbourhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, urged women from both the north and south of the Mediterranean to work hard to overcome discrimination and promote their rights. She assured them she is by their side.

Commenting on the conclusion of a two-day Women's Conference, organised by the *Generalitat de Catalunya* in Barcelona on 24-25 November and supported by the Commission, the Commissioner said "women are discriminated in our society in the north of the Mediterranean, and even more so in the south."

"We all still have a lot to do," she told the audience of women experts and representatives of NGOs related to gender issues. "We need to look back at the problems we had in the past, where we are now and where there is room for improvement in the future."

Describing the EuroMed process as "very special", Ms Ferrero-Waldner said she has attended all but one EuroMed ministerial conference therefore "can see the developments and the evolution of this process, even if it has not brought all the fruits."

She said the Commission shares many of the concerns addressed in the conference, such as the fact that women's rights are human rights and that migration and violence against women are issues that the EU and the Mediterranean countries should tackle together.

The Commissioner also outlined three priorities:

- Democracy, human rights and rule of law, including women's rights.
- Education, to combat illiteracy and increase opportunities.
- Trade and growth, which leads to more jobs.

Ms Ferrero-Waldner said her own positive experience with Mediterranean officials, especially during her term as UN Chief of Protocol, has not made her blind to the situation facing women in the EuroMed region.

She also expressed satisfaction with the positive reaction to the European Commission's proposal to hold a ministerial conference, in the second half of 2006, to discuss the situation of women. Reaching out to participants, she said she knows how they feel: "When it comes to discrimination, women have to work harder to achieve the same. I've experienced this myself. But despite this I have managed to achieve a lot."

"Speaking to you as colleagues and as women, I can say that you will find a real supporter in me," the Commissioner assured, and concluded: "I feel it is very important that we as women get involved."

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## EP PRESIDENT: EQUALITY NEEDED FOR ALLIANCE OF CIVILISATIONS

The EU and its MEDA partners need the participation and integration of women in public, economic and social life if they are to forge a lasting 'alliance of civilisations' based on common values, European Parliament (EP) President Josep Borrell told the EuroMed Woman's Conference held in Barcelona November 24-25, on the sidelines of the heads of state summit.

President Borrell called for gender equality to become a top priority in the Barcelona process and women's organisations to exert more pressure. He also backed civil society saying its initiatives should stimulate the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

The President told participants that during its Rabat meeting (21 November), the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) adopted a resolution urging governments to promote women's rights and facilitate their participation in social, economic and political life.

He said gender equality is an integral part of good governance and recognised the Barcelona process has not been sufficiently effective to this end. He recognised, however, that it is difficult to draw firm conclusions because of the insufficient statistics on women's situation in both the North and South.

"We are a long way from parity in the EU," he said. For example, in the EP there are 221 women members out of 732 (30.19 %). In the 25 Member States parliaments this figure stands at 22.5 %, while according to the World Bank the proportion of women parliamentarians in the Middle East and North Africa is the lowest in the world, at 5.82% in 2003.

President Borrell said a lot must be done to combat illiteracy. He was concerned with the low level of women's participation in the labour market, which is key to development. He said an estimated 35 million jobs will have to be created in the Southern Mediterranean by 2015, simply to keep unemployment down to its current levels.

The EP President wanted women to play a key role in redefining migration policies. He called for the acceleration of reforms to ensure equality before the law both in family and public life and asked for more action to eradicate violence against women.

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## BARCELONA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE NOVEMBER 24 - 25

### "EUROMED WOMEN CRITICAL OF PROGRESS MADE"

**W**omen from both the southern and northern shores of the Mediterranean called for tougher measures to improve women's rights, during a high-level conference held in Barcelona, on the sidelines of the heads of state summit.

Over 60 representatives of both governments and civil society attended the EuroMed Women's Conference on 24-25 November, to evaluate progress made since the launch of the Barcelona process ten years earlier.

Participants found that despite some progress women still have a long way to go before they can achieve equality with men. There is still a huge gap between what has been achieved and the expectations raised 10 years ago in Barcelona, they concluded.

Women's rights are synonymous to human rights and a key to development and cooperation but participants said the world of politics and work continued to discriminate against them. They criticised governments for not placing the issue on their agenda.

Many problems remain such as women's access to education, to work and to an income. Also crucial to bringing change and making a difference to the way society worked is a stronger women's participation in decision-making bodies. Combating violence against women was another number one priority that affected the north and south of the Mediterranean.

### GOVERNMENT ACTION URGED

European Commissioner for External Relations and the Neighbourhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, promised to give her full backing to conference requests for stronger government action. She said they have found "a real supporter" in her.

Participants welcomed her initiative to organise a European Commission high-level meeting with government and civil society participants in the second half of 2006 to discuss women's issues and define future actions. Many saw an important role for civil society in defining and achieving goals.

### DISCRIMINATION RIFE

Women continue to face discrimination in the South and the North, said Algerian Deputy Minister for family and women's issues Nouara Saadia Djaafar. She called for achievable and realistic plans that can be evaluated regularly.

Moroccan university professor Aicha Belarbi said she was disappointed with progress so far and underlined that to meet the goals set women's issues must become an integral part of all policies, while policies must be implemented.

Simone Susskind, President of Actions in the Mediterranean and advisor to the Belgian Prime Minister, suggested the creation of a "EuroMed Women's Observatory", to monitor each country.

## **INSECURITY HAMPERS PROGRESS**

Many speakers pointed to the region's insecurity to explain the lack of progress.

The Lebanese deputy Bahia Hariri said efforts to bring about equality between men and women could be stifled without first making progress on establishing security and stability in the region. Using the situation in her country as an example, she stressed there is no goal more important than peace and security.

Professor Naomi Chazan, a former member of the Knesset, said discrimination is intensified in areas of violent conflict and called for a culture of peace to be developed. On a similar note, Gila Svirskl of the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories said that as long as security is defined by power, conflict will continue.

Pinar Ilkcaraca of the Women for Human Rights Watch-New Way in Turkey, emphasised that Islam religion cannot be blamed from women's continuing oppression. Samira Bikarden of the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women explained the problem is the interpretation of Islam and not Islam itself.

Egyptian ambassador, of the National Council for Women, Smiha Abu Steit referred to the need for respect of differences and all partners to come together and negotiate on an equal footing.

## **WOMEN AS A RESOURCE**

The chairperson of the Arab International Women's Forum Haifa Fehoum Al Kaylani warned there are growing economic opportunities yet women remain an unexploited resource as only 25% of Arab women are working. She said it is essential for women to get into the mainstream of the economy.

Discussing the problem of educating girls and women, Amina Lemrini of the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women highlighted that education is not accessible to girls in all MEDA countries. Even when they had access to education, the teaching content continued to reinforce sexist stereotypes. She said this also applies to countries of the north.

Activist and journalist of the *Jordan Times* Rana Husseini said that although education levels in her county had improved, schoolbooks were marked by discriminatory

messages and teachers were unaware of the problem of discrimination in schools and the role they played in perpetrating it.

## **PANEL**

### **THE CONFERENCE CONCLUSIONS**

Participants concluded that “equal opportunities between men and women is a cross-cutting issue, with deep impact in the economic and human development of the people and countries living together in the Mediterranean space.”

Participants wanted ‘legal guarantees’ that women’s rights will be respected, and warned failure to respect or limit them is a breach of human rights. Patriarchy was blamed as one of the reasons why it is not easy for women in the EuroMed region to achieve full and effective recognition of their rights.

The said participation in public life, and especially in decision-making is of ‘fundamental importance’ and demand a gender perspective in all public policies. “For this”, they emphasise in their conclusions, “political will is mandatory, as well as adequate financial resources.”

Participants called for cooperation and a viable solution to the problem of migration. They warned not to forget the women migrants who make up as much as half of those seeking to move to the north and suffer from intense marginalization.

The conference emphasized that women’s rights cannot be advanced in the absence of a secure and safe environment. It called for women’s involvement in the development of a culture of peace, in conflict resolution processes and in deciding security and foreign policies.

They want to see more funds given to the women’s movement and greater support and recognition for civil society. Information on women’s networks in the Mediterranean region should be enhanced and there should be regular monitoring of women’s situations in each country.

### **WHAT THE EU CAN DO**

The conference called on the EU to:

- Support efforts for gender equality by including a gender perspective in its development policies and its criteria for selection of projects.
- Make women’s rights explicit in the Association Agreements, even if a clause on fundamental rights is included, while an anti-discriminatory clause should be incorporated.
- The same principles should be applied to the European Neighbourhood Policy and all other negotiations carried out.

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## PHOTOGRAPHS

The following photographs are available as JPEGs.  
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IMG\_8866.jpg - First session: Ms. Sophie Bessis, Ms. Anna Simó, Ms. Esther Fouchier



IMG\_8789.jpg / IMG\_8803.jpg - Opening ceremony of the EuroMed Women's Conference, during the speech of M. Borrell, President of the European Parliament



IMG\_8896.jpg - Ms. Anelli Jätteenmäki (MEP), M. Schoefthaler (Executive Director Anna Lindh Foundation), Ms. Haifa Fahoum Al Kaylani (President, Arab International Women's Forum)



IMG\_8936.jpg - Official Dinner: Ms. Anita Gradin, M. Pasqual Maragall, President of the Government of Catalonia, Ms. Nouara Saadia Djaafar, Deputy Minister for family and women's issues



IMG\_8879.jpg - Ms. Hariri



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IMG\_9186.jpg / IMG\_9136.jpg / IMG\_9179.jpg / - Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner