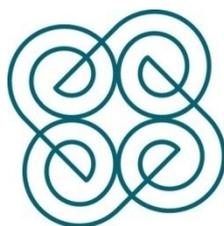


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Uachtaránacht na hÉireann ar
Chomhairle an Aontais Eorpaigh
Irish Presidency of the Council
of the European Union
eu2013.ie

ADDRESS BY MINISTER OF STATE MS. KATHLEEN LYNCH T.D.

IRELAND TO THE FEMM COMMITTEE OF THE EUROPEAN

PARLIAMENT

22ND JANUARY 2013

Mr. Chairperson, Parliamentary Colleagues

It gives me great pleasure to open what I hope will be a fruitful debate this morning on the programme of this, the seventh Irish Presidency, in relation to the achievement of de facto gender equality across the European Union.

I was delighted to participate actively in a lengthy and wide ranging discussion with you, Mr. Chair, and with a small group of your colleagues, during your exploratory visit to Dublin in November. Our session this morning affords us the opportunity to expand that debate to the full membership of the illustrious FEMM Committee which deals so ably on the wide range of issues which impact on women's rights and gender equality.

The year 2013 represents the fortieth anniversary of Ireland's accession to the European Economic Community, when six Member States became nine. The last Irish Presidency saw 15 Member States become 27 and

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we look forward to the extension of the spirit of European co-operation to Croatia in 2013 and to others in the years to come.

Dear Colleagues

Membership of the European Economic Community had a very significant impact on the women of Ireland. The body of European gender equality legislation strengthened the economic well-being of women in Ireland. As a result, Ireland now benefits from one of the best educated female, and indeed male, workforces in Europe, even with our present economic difficulties. Very many of our graduates are employed in high added value sectors, producing goods and services which were unimaginable those forty years ago. Membership of the European Union attracted very many multi-national companies to our shores and these created both exports and employment opportunities.

The institutional mechanisms we established in Ireland to address discrimination and promote equality, including gender equality, became models of good practice. They are now again being strengthened through a new structure which will link together the equality and human rights functions for the betterment of both.

You will be aware that Ireland was one of the first victims of the economic downturn, due mainly to an overheated construction sector and the significant expansion of financial credit in the middle years of the last decade. We know that the impact on employment by gender varied from country to country. The more immediate impact was on

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male employment in Ireland. Our concerns in Ireland mirror those of the FEMM Committee on the impact of the downturn on young people but also on female employment and female poverty levels, all of which are now matters of grave concern across Europe.

Ireland also has the challenge of being the first “Programme” country to assume the Presidency of the European Union.

Irish people are well recognised for their optimism. We believe that this optimism is helping us to ride out the economic storms that have challenged us over the past few years. We bring the same optimism, and indeed determination, to our Presidency. In tackling the priorities for the Irish Presidency, I can assure you that Ireland will be looking beyond our immediate national issues, to take the broad and far reaching perspective, which is required of a successful Presidency.

Mr. Chairperson, Committee Members

The Irish Presidency represents the start of a new Trio and I am collaborating with my Lithuanian and Greek colleagues in the preparation of a Trio Declaration which will contextualise and coordinate our three Presidency Programmes in relation to gender equality. I am hopeful that the Ministers from Lithuania and Greece will be guests in Dublin in late April to sign the Trio Declaration.

The overarching theme of this, the seventh Irish E.U. Presidency, is “Stability, Jobs and Growth” for the European Union. In this context, we

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must not lose sight of the importance of gender equality as a contributor to economic growth, across Europe.

Equality should not be seen as a cost but as a vital component of a strong economy to which all citizens contribute and from which all citizens can benefit. The European Pact for Gender Equality, adopted by the Council in 2011, acknowledged that gender equality policies are vital to economic growth, prosperity and competitiveness. The efficient use of human capital is a key determinant of an economy's competitiveness.

These themes have informed much of our gender equality programme and we are placing a particular focus on "Women's economic engagement in the context of the Europe 2020 Agenda".

Thanks to an offer of generous funding from the Progress Fund of the European Commission, we are planning to host a high level technical conference on this theme at the end of April and we are hopeful that you, Mr. Chairperson, will be able to participate actively in this event.

The conference will be technical in nature. We plan to bring together national gender equality experts and national employment experts from all Member States, candidate countries and our E.E.A. partners. We will offer them the opportunity to explore recent research, statistical evidence and good practices to enhance women's labour market participation.

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We want to forge a way to maximise opportunities to enable our particularly well educated female population in Europe to achieve their full potential. It makes sense that we all collaborate to ensure that we optimise the contribution of our women to economic growth and global competitiveness, not least as some of our global competitors are considered to be more advanced than Europe in this regard.

The new employment strategy, and a number of recent Commission statements, have focused on female labour market participation as an economic necessity. Many of our global competitors out-perform Europe on this parameter at present. If the European Union is to achieve its Europe 2020 keynote employment goals, we collectively need to take a two pronged approach. We need to both deal with, and also to look beyond, the current economic crisis.

To achieve the Europe 2020 employment goals, we must work together to increase women's employment rates. As Minister for Gender Equality, I welcome the new focus being placed on the barriers to women's labour market engagement in the European Semester process and in the Country Specific Recommendations being made by the European Commission.

During the conference on women's economic engagement, we plan to look at women who opt for employment and also to look at options to encourage women in entrepreneurial roles. We have an excellent programme to enhance female entrepreneurship in Ireland at present

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and would like to exchange experiences with other Member States, hearing and learning from each other in a true spirit of community.

Distinguished colleagues

Although we are not holding an Informal Council of Gender Equality Ministers during the Irish Presidency, Employment and Social Protection Ministers will gather in Dublin in February for an Informal Council of EPSCO Ministers. The participating Ministers will have the option to participate in a dedicated workshop on gender equality, which I will chair.

As I mentioned previously, I have responsibility for a number of areas of Government. The needs of “Older People” are another issue under my remit. I am very much aware that, across Europe, as in Ireland, older women continue to remain under-represented in the labour market. This detachment from economic independence can lead to diminished pension entitlement and to poverty in older age.

While there has been an increase in the numbers of older women – that is, those aged 50 to 64 years - in the labour market in recent years, there is still a very significant gap between the numbers of men and of women in this age group who are economically active.

We will use the Gender Equality Workshop at the Informal EPSCO to exchange good practices and discuss policy options on the steps Member States might take to enable older people to enhance their

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economic independence and avoid poverty in older age, while also contributing to economic growth in Europe.

We plan to submit a Presidency information note on the outcomes of both this workshop and April's conference to the June EPSCO Council and are hopeful that this important work, linking gender equality, women's economic well-being and Europe's economic growth will be taken forward by the European institutions in the future.

Mr. Chairperson, FEMM Committee members,

We, in Ireland, welcome and appreciate the work of your Committee, and of the Parliament, on the difficult topic of violence against women. The Council and the European Parliament agree on the need to address this topic. We have worked well together, establishing the Daphne Programme, the Directive on Trafficking, the European Protection Order and the Directive on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime.

Violence against women continues to be a significant challenge in each of our Member States. The work of the Cypriot Presidency on this heinous crime is most welcome. The research undertaken by EIGE and the Council Conclusions adopted at EPSCO in December 2012 add to our understanding and inform our policy focus.

They are also most timely as Violence against Women is the key theme of the 57th meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women, which

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takes place in the beginning of March. I will lead the Irish Delegation. It will be my privilege to deliver the EU's Statement to the Plenary and to support actively the work of CSW in relation to this important theme.

After the failure of the 56th session of the CSW to agree an outcome document on rural women, I think that all parties are aware that the 57th session will present a particular challenge. As I understand it, on the only previous occasion, on which there was no outcome document, the topic was violence against women.

We all agree that there is no country in Europe, indeed, no country in the world, in which violence against women is not a significant problem. Accordingly, I believe that it is essential that all U.N. Members collaborate closely to ensure that a sharp, tight set of Agreed Conclusions on Violence against Women are finalised before the end of CSW.

Work on the preparation of an EU position paper began many months ago, through the European External Action Service, our human rights experts, our gender equality and violence against women experts and our diplomats. I believe that collaboration and co-operation will be central to the achievement of the goal of an outcome document and I am committing myself and my team to do our best to achieve the Agreed Conclusions from the 57th C.S.W. that we all hope for.

During my time at C.S.W., I hope to participate in a number of parallel or side events organised by the EU and by the Irish Mission. These side

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events afford C.S.W. participants the opportunity to hear about good practice and to actively exchange opinions in a structured forum.

During my visit to New York I hope to talk about and learn about good practice at Member State levels, collaborating with a number of European Ministerial colleagues. On behalf of my own Government, I also hope to showcase some of the initiatives undertaken with the support of Irish Aid, our international aid agency which has long prioritised violence against women.

I am sure that the Irish team, and colleagues from across Member States who will participate actively in CSW57, will take to New York good wishes from all the EU institutions, including those of this Committee and of the whole Parliament, for the success of the negotiations.

Not unrelated to the issue of violence against women and domestic violence, the FEMM Committee will be pleased to hear that there has been considerable progress on the dossier on the European Protection Order in recent Presidencies. I would like to compliment your distinguished colleague Ms Antoniya Paranova for her work in advancing this dossier.

The European Protection Order is an important part of the EU Victims' package. The provision of a standard certificate will facilitate the ready recognition without any additional formalities of protection measures across EU borders.

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This will enable a person to have continuity of protection under the law when they move between member states, whether for work, study or other reasons. My senior colleague, Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence, Mr. Alan Shatter has indicated his strong commitment to improving protection for victims of crime as envisaged within the Victims' Package as a whole. The Irish Presidency intends to build on the work of the Cypriot Presidency with a view to the adoption of the measure by the Council and Parliament as soon as possible in the first semester of 2013.

To support the protection of victims of trafficking, who are so frequently women, my Irish Justice colleagues are working on an initiative concerning the Provision of Information on the Rights of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings. This will build on the EU Commission's four year strategy on the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings, published last Summer; and is also timely in the context of the EU Directive concerning human trafficking which is due for implementation by 6 April this year.

Dear Colleagues

Some 20 years ago, the idea of a Fourth World Summit of Women was mooted. It resulted in the indispensable Beijing Platform for Action, the blueprint for the achievement of gender equality, which is as relevant in the most advanced as it is in the least advanced countries. Speaking honestly, I think we all agree that there is still much to be done to achieve de facto gender equality.

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I do not need to remind you of the twelve areas of concern identified in the Beijing Platform. In association with the Commission's High Level Group on Gender Mainstreaming, successive EU Presidencies have undertaken research work to assist Member States in monitoring progress on the implementation of the individual areas of concern identified in Beijing.

Indicators on ten of the twelve areas of concern have already been developed and Ireland decided in 2011 that it would prepare indicators in relation to women and the media as part of its Gender Equality programme during this, our seventh Presidency.

Mr. Chairperson, Colleagues,

You will already be aware of the excellent body of research being undertaken by the European Institute on Gender Equality both to support Presidencies on the Beijing Platform and also to ensure the advancement of gender equality.

Of course, I have to acknowledge, as a small digression, that we, in Ireland, have a special attachment to EIGE, as provisional agreement on its establishment was one of the outcomes of our last Irish Presidency.

Work in relation to the topic of media must be dealt with in a measured manner. Freedom of expression and freedom of the media are fundamental rights which must be respected at all times. These

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freedoms are identified and respected in the Beijing Platform. But the Beijing Platform also points out clearly that the media can play a significant role in raising awareness on gender equality and the advancement of the role of women.

All of the international instruments on gender equality - CEDAW; Beijing; the European Union Pact on Gender Equality, signed in 2010; and the Commission's Gender Equality Strategy, emphasise the importance of achieving gender equality in decision-making. In relation to its critical area of concern on women and the media, the Beijing Platform for Action emphasises the need for women to have roles as decision-makers, not just in management but also in the development of programme, media or newspaper content.

Media is too broad a topic to be addressed comprehensively within a single study to develop SMART indicators, linked to Beijing. I think we can all acknowledge that much has already been written about gender stereotypes and it would be difficult to develop numerically measurable indicators on this complex topic. I am already very much aware of the wonderful work done by this FEMM Committee on a diverse range of issues linked to gender stereotyping.

I decided that Ireland's Presidency work on this occasion, in relation to the Beijing Platform, would focus on the development of indicators measuring women in decision-making roles.

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The draft EIGE report is approaching completion. It has looked at one or more broadcast media companies and one or more newspapers in each Member State and in our accession Member State, Croatia. With such a small sample, drawn from each Member State, this is a slightly limited exercise.

However, we believe that the outcomes will give us very good indications of the presence of women in decision-making roles in both the broadcast and news media in Member States. As a second aspect of the research, EIGE have also looked at the presence of policies to foster gender equality among media companies.

This approach builds upon the programme of work on women in decision-making roles, which has been a key strand of activity across a number of previous Presidencies. Most recently, my Danish colleagues developed indicators for women in decision-making roles in the environment.

You may also be aware that the Commission already monitors women's roles as decision-makers in six fields, including management, governance, politics, the diplomatic service and the judiciary.

Arising from this research, we plan to draft Council Conclusions to seek a commitment from Member States to monitor trends in the number of women in a range of decision-making roles in the media. We will develop this proposal in the coming months. We are planning to send the draft conclusions to the June meeting of the EPSCO Council for

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discussion and decision. As is customary, the EIGE report will accompany the draft Council Conclusions as an annexe and it is expected that it will also be published. EIGE now prepares a comprehensive communication strategy to disseminate its research related to the Beijing Platform and to raise awareness union-wide on the key issues.

This reference to women and decision-making brings me to mention another task of our Presidency. We expect to begin technical work on the European Commission's draft Directive in relation to women's presence on corporate boards in the beginning of February.

We hope to make considerable progress on the dossier during our Presidency. This dossier is not without its challenges. It had already received considerable publicity before the Commission had published its proposals. Some Member States have already put in place quotas for women on corporate boards. Others have established targets. Some Member States already have made some strides in this regard, others, including Ireland, are still in single digit percentages.

The European Parliament and the Council have both affirmed the importance of gender equality in decision-making. We need to draw on the talents of both women and men if Europe's economy is to flourish. International research has shown the psychological and business benefits of having a gender balance to optimise economic decision-making. This research emanates from some far-sighted European Member States and from the U.S.A.

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Some Member States are already reporting excellent outcomes as a result of positive initiatives including policy papers; awareness raising; and of the establishment of quotas or targets, which, collectively and severally, appear to have brought increases in women's representation on corporate boards. However there are still significant differences in the roles of women on boards in different Member States and in the context of its ongoing work in relation to the advancement of women in decision-making, the Commission has now brought forward measured proposals.

The EU Treaties are clear in their message in relation to the achievement of de facto gender equality particularly in employment. This is referred to in article 157 of the Treaties. The EU is also committed to gender equality in Article 8 of the T.F.E.U., which states that "in all its activities, the Union shall aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality, between men and women."

Recognising the importance of the initiative, the Cyprus Presidency organised a lunch time debate at the EPSCO Council on 6 December last year, with a view to providing orientation for future discussions.

It is no secret that the Member States hold contrasting views on the issue, some calling for quotas, others for self-regulation. We must work to ensure fairness and to encourage progress in this area. The Commission's proposal focuses, in particular, on the procedure for appointing board members and on transparency. However, it also seeks to ensure that we do not impose unreasonable burdens, for example on

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S.M.E.s and on Member States that have already taken successful action..

The Council looks forward to working closely with the European Parliament on this draft Directive. I am hopeful that Member States, through the Council structures, will participate actively in the examination of the Commission's proposals in order to reach an early agreement on a mutually acceptable text for the Directive, which is intended to enhance our gender equality acquis, and to strengthen business decision-making. However, this is not to underestimate the considerable challenges likely to be associated with the progression of this dossier.

Mr Chairperson, fellow politicians

I would now like to turn to the Maternity Leave Directive. As you all are fully aware this dossier has reached an impasse. I myself have attended a number of meetings regarding this proposal including an Informal Gender Minister's Council in Cracow during the Polish Presidency. At that meeting the majority of Member States made it clear that they could not accept the Parliament's key amendments on grounds of cost and affordability in the current economic climate. Also concerns were expressed that the Parliament's approach to suggesting amendments far exceed the minimum standards requirement for an EU Directive and breach subsidiary and proportionately principles.

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The Irish Presidency intends to make an attempt to broker an acceptable compromise with the EP, Council and Commission. I have to say frankly – and I said this to your deputation when we met during the visit to Dublin late last year - that our assessment is that breaking the impasse is dependant on the Parliament being willing to agree on a pragmatic compromise that will be much closer to the Commission's original position than to the Parliament's amendments.

Finding a resolution to the impasse that exists will be the focus of our informal contacts during the Presidency on this dossier. We hope that a breakthrough will be possible, but this depends on a willingness to compromise for what is possible rather than for the ideal members of the Committee might wish to achieve.

The main purpose in my coming here today is to present to you the diverse programme of activities we are planning during our Presidency, in relation to the achievement of de facto gender equality.

To date, we have scheduled some 14 separate meetings and events in relation to gender equality issues to achieve these ambitious commitments. Ireland has long been a country driven by ambition, both at national and at European levels. We will respond proactively to the development of further initiatives to foster gender equality and equality of opportunity for women during our Presidency, if the opportunity arises.

To summarise, we will be addressing issues which are widely diverse, ranging from “women and the media” to “women on corporate boards”.

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We are also actively addressing issues which are central to the economic growth of our European Union including the economic engagement of women of women of all ages. This is with a view to fostering their economic independence and also to maximising their contribution to ensure Europe's global competitiveness.

The Irish Presidency will deal with issues which are central to the welfare as women, particularly as we seek to advance European and global commitments on the many aspects of violence against women during the forthcoming meeting of U.N C.S.W. 57.

Dear Parliamentarians,

I ask for your support as we tackle this demanding programme of work. I am happy to answer any questions you may have and look forward to a fruitful collaboration with the European Parliament and the FEMM Committee in the coming months of this, the seventh Irish Presidency of our European Union.

Thank you very much for your attention.