



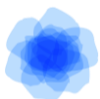
PRESIDÊNCIA DO CONSELHO DE MINISTROS  
*Ministro da Presidência*

**Committee on Women's Right and  
Gender Equality  
European Parliament  
Minister for the Presidency of the Council of Ministers  
Pedro Silva Pereira  
16 July 2007 - Brussels**

Madam President  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me to start by extending my thanks to you, Madam President, for your warm and friendly welcome. I would also like to salute the European Parliament and all the members of the Committee. I am grateful for this excellent opportunity to present the programme and the priorities of the Portuguese presidency on gender equality to you. The cooperation of the other European institutions, and in particular the European Parliament is always crucial to the success of any Presidency of the Council, but I am well aware – the Portuguese presidency is well aware – that this cooperation is particularly important in an area like this in which the European Parliament has a tradition of vigilance and initiative in defending fundamental rights, the value of equality and truly equal opportunities in Europe.

Going directly to the point, I would like to remind you that the Portuguese presidency's programme for gender equality comes, of course, within the programme defined by the three presidencies – German, Portuguese and Slovenian. This 18-month programming is unprecedented in its assurance of a stable reference framework for the initiatives of the different presidencies whilst safeguarding the sensibility of each. So we will be working in full knowledge of what has already been done at European level and, in particular, the efforts in this area of the German presidency which preceded us in this the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All.



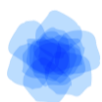


As all parliamentarians know, when there are many priorities, often the outcome is that nothing is a priority. Therefore, the Portuguese presidency's programme for gender equality essentially has three clear priorities which we intend to pursue seriously:

- Developing the so-called gender mainstreaming, that is, the valorisation of gender issues in the different sectorial policies;
- Fostering gender employability and entrepreneurship for effective equal opportunities in the labour market;
- Reinforcing the conditions conciliating professional, personal and family life.

The social dimension of the Lisbon Strategy, which strives for a more competitive and inclusive society, is clear in its demand for the promotion of gender equality and effective equal opportunities. And this path can only be taken if the transversal nature of equal gender policies is fully recognised. Following up the work already set into motion by the Peking Action Platform, in September Portugal will host the "Meeting of the High Level Group on gender mainstreaming" in Lisbon with the aim of defining indicators. The definition of indicators is extremely important so that a more rigorous assessment of progress can be made as well as comparisons between the situations in the various European countries. The discussion of poverty indicators from the gender perspective is a particularly important aspect on the agenda of this high level meeting which will subsequently be submitted to the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council.

But it is in the employment question that the Lisbon Strategy confronts the challenge of gender equality most clearly. Everyone knows the problem: the situations of gender discrimination that still remain, including salary differences between men and women; the difficulties women have in getting jobs in certain sectors or in specific circumstances; precarious employment which now affects women especially; the specific needs in terms of education and life long vocational training. For all these reasons, the Portuguese presidency has chosen to highlight the subjects of employability and gender entrepreneurship and place them at the top of the



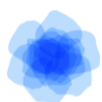


agenda both at the Conference of Experts on Gender Equality and the Informal Meeting of Equality Ministers which will be held on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> October in Lisbon. We want to contribute to a debate that enables the identification of best practices and the definition of concrete measures able to combat gender discrimination and foster more effective equal opportunities.

Clearly, it is impossible to discuss gender problems in the working world without also confronting the key issue of reconciling professional, personal and family life. This will constantly be on the table during the Portuguese presidency. And it is not, and can never be, a less important issue. This question concerns fundamental rights and the very happiness of individuals. But it is also a question of how families are organized and run, and how society valorises maternity and paternity at the very moment we are confronting a significant demographic challenge with disappointing birth rates.

While the conciliation issue is by no means new, today it is seen in a new and much more dramatic light. The demands of the competitiveness of the world economy mean that companies must adapt both the way they work and the actual structuring of working contracts and ties. And while these modifications prejudice mid and long term personal and family plans as a whole, it is in fact women who are the first victims of these changes in terms of precarious and unstable employment. This problem cannot dispense with interventions from the State and public policies – legal protection against discrimination, social support for families, incentives for good practices, and the example set by the administration and public companies. But it also requires that, on one hand, companies assume their social responsibility and, on the other, that the social partners assume a new agenda for social dialogue. Of one thing I am sure: given the size of the demographic problem in Europe and a context in which the redistribution of work within the family remains incomplete, this is undoubtedly one of the most important problems of the “social question” at the start of this century.

I would like to finish, Madam President, by highlighting two other initiatives of the Portuguese presidency in this area which I consider of great importance.





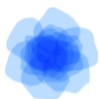
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On 8th and 9th October we will hold a Conference on “Gender and Human Trafficking” in the city of Porto. We cannot ignore this increasingly serious problem of human trafficking or the gender dimension frequently associated to it in which women often fall victim to criminal networks of exploitation and violence. The Portuguese presidency cannot overlook this serious problem which demands urgent and comprehensive responses, along the lines of what is recommended by the Council of Europe’s Convention on Human Trafficking, by the European Union’s roadmap on equality between men and women and by the recent Action Plan on good practices in the fight against and prevention of human trafficking.

Lastly, I remind you that the Closing Conference of the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All will take place during the Portuguese presidency, in November. We want to make this Conference yet another good occasion to take advantage of this European year so as to add momentum to the necessary mobilisation of public opinion on the fundamental value of equality and on the immense task of a society which is more just and with more equal opportunities.

These are, in short, the main priorities of the Portuguese presidency on gender equality for which I trust I can rely on the active cooperation of the European Parliament. Cooperation that I am sure will begin with the dialogue we will now have in this Committee and in which I am looking forward to participating.

Thank you very much!



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