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Advancing women's health and gender equality in Eastern Partnership's countries

Towards more parliamentary engagement

Concept Note

Overview

The **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) were agreed in 2015 by all Member States of the United Nations as a successor of the Millennium Development Goals. The SDGs entered into force on 1 January 2016 and contain 17 Goals and 169 targets to lead world's development until 2030 and improve the well-being and equality for all people.

Additionally and more specifically for this Concept note, all five countries of the Euronest are signatories to the **Beijing Declaration** and Platform for Action of September 1995, and the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action (**Cairo Conference**) of September 1994, two main international agreements that created a platform for action for gender equality and population issues. All countries have shown considerable achievements in review reports of ICPD, Beijing and MDG processes. However major challenges still persist specifically in overcoming regional, urban/rural and educative gaps in achieving well-being and equality for all.

The European Parliament Resolution (13 December 2016) on Rights of Women in the Eastern Partnership States (2016/2060(INI)) stressed the need for the EaP countries **to take immediate action to increase equality between women and men in society**, including the adoption of national action plans and cooperation with international organisations and civil society stakeholders. It also underlined the positive role that the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly can play in promoting women's political participation and their visibility in the Eastern Partnership.

Following this Resolution, the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly wished to explore the possibility of conducting a Consultation specifically dedicated to the achievement of the *SDG Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages* and *SDG Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls* and more concretely to the role that the Parliamentarians – members of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly can play in ensuring their achievement.

In particular:

Gender equality remains a horizontal priority within the European Neighbourhood Policy and the European Neighbourhood Instrument. According to the ICPD Beyond 2014 Review, there have been great achievements in bringing gender gap in most European countries, especially in regards to completing secondary and higher education¹. The review document however notes that the discrimination against women and girls still exists. Hourly **gender pay gap** persists although it shows a slight reduction.

Stereotypes widely conveyed by society leave women in a subordinate role. These stereotypes start to develop during childhood, are reflected in educational and training choices and continue into the labour market. Women are significantly absent from the **structures of power in the Eastern Partnership States**.

Violence against women remains an issue. Recent European Parliament Resolution (13 December 2016) on Rights of Women in the Eastern Partnership States (2016/2060(INI))² has noted serious shortcomings in access to justice for women victims of gender-based violence. There is severe under-reporting of such crimes, very few convictions for rape, and very little or no state funding for support services. The lifetime prevalence of physical violence is over 20 % in four of the five countries.

Eastern Partnership countries are lagging behind in reaching all women, especially those in the poorest, most remote areas and those belonging to marginalised groups (national minorities, migrants and women with disabilities) for the provision of **prenatal care and skilled birth attendance at delivery**. The services such as emergency obstetric care and essential supplies in place are crucial in reducing maternal mortality.

Women and men in Eastern partnership countries often face difficulties in **accessing sexual and reproductive health services and rights (SRHR)**. Serious barriers still exist for poor women, migrants, ethnic minorities and those who live in rural areas: fewer than 50 per cent of women in EaP countries use modern methods of contraceptive, and in some countries even fewer than 20 per cent, the main reasons being poor counselling, high costs, and lack of choice and unreliable supply of contraceptives;

The risk of dying from cervical cancer is 10 times higher in EaP countries than in Western Europe, that it is the most common form of cancer among women of 15-44 years of age and that it therefore has far-reaching effects on the fabric of society. There is a strong need for nationally organised screening and vaccination programmes to combat these trends.

¹ https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/pau/icpd/Conference/Regional_Report/Executive_Summary.pdf

² <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+TA+P8-TA-2016-0487+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN>

The role of Parliamentarians

Parliamentarians act as the bridge between the people and their government and are therefore instrumental in advocating for the rights and needs of the people. By enacting and improving relevant laws and policies, parliamentarians help to create an enabling environment for the achievement of the SDG goals and play a critical role in mobilizing necessary resources.

The outcome document for the UN Summit to adopt the Post 2015 Development Agenda **"Transforming our World, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"** has underlined the essential role of national parliaments in the agenda implementation through their enactment of legislation and adoption of budgets as well as their role in ensuring accountability for the effective implementation of commitments. (para 39). It urged parliaments and other actors "to embrace this commitment to sustainable development by directing investments and activities towards areas that contribute to sustainable development and away from harmful, unsustainable one." (para 70). Parliaments are also encouraged to engage in national reviews on progress made on the SDGs over the next 15 years.

Hence, the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly has proposed to organise a conference to discuss the UN SDG 3 and 5 and the means of parliamentary involvement, ensuring accountability and engagement in their implementation.