

Albanian Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs

(Session 16) Gender equality

Madam Moderator,

Albania fully supports and aligns itself with the EU statement. In addition I would like to provide some highlights of our national efforts in gender equality.

The achievement of gender equality is among the key priority objectives of the Albanian Government. In cooperation and with the support of civil society and international organizations, especially UN organizations in the framework of "One UN" Program 2012-2016 a series of initiatives and legal improvements have been undertaken; specific policies and programs have been implemented; the respective support structures have been strengthened and the capacities of the human resources engaged and dealing with these issues have been built and enhanced.

The approval of some amendments to the Labor Code of December 2015 have introduced new provisions which included: an enhanced definition of sexual harassment in the work place; the reversal of the burden of proof for sexual harassment; additional guarantees for women's return to work after their maternity leave; non-discriminatory remuneration for all, etc.. Amendments made to the Law on Social Insurance also recognize the right for paternity leave.

Measures have been taken to increase the employment of women through additional employment programs, given the diversity of Albanian demographic specifics and respective needs. This is especially ally important for women heads of households and young mothers who have dependent children up to age 18, due to the shortages and difficulties of of finding appropriate jobs in the labor market.

Legislative changes and the introduction of 30% quotas for the less represented gender ensure increased representation of women in the decision-making processes in political and public life.

During the drafting of the new Strategy on Gender Equality for the year 2016-2020 (pending approval), attention was paid to women's economic empowerment, focusing especially on women and in rural areas, the fight against gender-based violence and domestic violence and in the executive domain of law enforcement, layout and functioning of the referral mechanism in the country, strengthening of institutional mechanisms for gender equality and its respective support structures with human and financial resources; proper allocation of funds for the planning, implementation and financing of this development strategy.

Through the implementation of the Decision of the Council of Ministers on "Gender Mainstreaming in the Medium Term Budget Program", some sectors and programs that are critical in providing economic support and empowerment of women were given the opportunity to

budget planning and management of gender-based budgetary allocation.

Another important success in this field has to do with the inclusion of gender equality as a basic principle in the changes of the Organic Budget Law adopted in early June 2016. This innovation, initially will force all budgetary programs of line ministries and budgetary institutions to necessarily include gender equality at the policy level.

This is also an objective of the Government of Albania, and part of the continuous recommendations given in the framework of several Conventions and Albania`s EU Integration.

The National Gender Equality Council, chaired by the Minister of Social Welfare and Youth, has recently strengthened its role in the approval of key documents and recommendations to improve gender equality in the country.

The network of gender employees in ministries and municipalities, and the local coordinators against violence are part of the country`s gender equality mechanism. In addition, women MPs have played an important role since the establishment – for the first time in 2013 – of Alliance of Women MPs in the Albanian Parliament with several legal initiatives.

Similarly, the Alliance of Women Counselors was established for the first time this year in the Municipality of Tirana helping women deal with social problems and challenges of the economic empowerment.

The engagement of the civil society is also very important for their expertise, partnership, initiatives to improve the status of women, participation in consultation tables on documents like Strategies and Action Plans, legal amendments, awareness-raising campaigns, cooperation, support, legal counseling, etc..

Zero tolerance for violence against women and domestic violence is the main motto of the Albanian Government for the achievement of positive societal changes in this domain with the involvement and inclusion of all relevant factors.

The increased awareness and strengthened implementation and executive structures, along with better coordination in cases of domestic violence have led to an increased number of criminal proceedings, court protection orders as well as greater public sensitivity towards this negative phenomenon.

With the coordination of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, and in cooperation with central and local institutions, civil society organizations, as well as with the support of international organizations, several awareness-raising campaigns have been organized. Such was the campaign of 16 days of activism against gender-based violence under the motto: "Men part of the solution – show you are against violence"; the "He for She" campaign as public events to encourage the implementation of specific components of the National Action Plan for Men and Boys including the UN UNiTE orange campaign. Thank you for your attention!