

## **Member of Parliament Ms Eva Biaudet**

Congress in cooperation with Women Lawyers in Finland

The Future of Europe: Enlargement

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Distinguished participants,

**In 1906 Finnish women were the first in the world to obtain full political rights** i.e. the right to vote in national elections and to be elected. We Finnish women like to think that the strong political presentation by women has been one major determinant in shaping our welfare- and educational systems.

In Finland the demand for equality has the backing of the law. The act on Equality between Women and Men came into force at the beginning of 1987. In 1995 the quota provision was added. This has increased women's participation in decision making in government committees, advisory boards as well as in municipal bodies. The Act, furthermore, makes positive discrimination possible when appointing persons into offices generally dominated by the other sex. This government has now a fresh new law proposal on its desk, where the questions of promoting equal pay for equally worthy jobs, evaluation of gender-consequences of legislation and widening the scope of application are in focus.

Finland, like other Nordic countries have participated in the construction of the so-called Nordic model of equality. Here it is founded on individual income, individual social security, separate taxation of spouses, and perhaps the most important of all: services enabling women to participate in working life (with parental leaves, home care allowance, children's day care, and free school meals service).

In the year of 2001, 56 000 children were born in Finland, which was about 9000 less than ten years ago. The low birth rate is primarily explained by the fact that the small cohorts born in the 1970s have now reached childbearing age. By European standards the Finnish fertility rate is still high at 1.74, the EU-average being 1.53. With the exception of the Nordic countries, other European countries have invested clearly less in family support than Finland. During the Finnish EU-presidency we put a lot of effort into looking for indicators and connections between social systems, labour participation and birth rates. When women work there seems to be a positive correlation between the amount of family policy support and birth rate.

In Finland, both parents of the vast majority of families with children work. In contrast to so many other countries, mothers also work full time. In such a situation, a reliable, safe and reasonably priced child care system is very important for the women and the family, but also for the economy. Today all families have a subjective right by law to municipal day-care for their children. Alternatively, families have an option of receiving financial support if they choose to arrange private or other forms of day-care for their children.

The gender issue is of course also an issue for men. And usually all parties win when parenthood is shared more equally. Despite the fact that our legislation offers fathers possibilities to do this, only a few percent use more than their three week long (18 weekdays) paternity leave. Therefore we introduced a one month of parental leave reserved only for fathers as a carrot and support. Upon this the parents can, apart from the four month of mothers leave, decide in which way to share the rest 7 months of the parental leave.

OECD reports from Austria and Germany claim that long maternity leaves reduces return to working life. I would claim that this only reduces the amount of children. It is a very short sighted policy to force women to choose between family and working carrier. In Europe we need both. When reconciling the needs of working life and family life in general, the purpose is to increase well-being not only within families but also within the work communities; which has a bearing on work performance and productivity

**Violence against women** is a global, but also a very European social and human rights problem, that impairs the implementation of equality in society. Violence against women and girls, in public or in private is a human rights violation. It would be high time to implement the international norms on violence against women and girls and in particular concerning sexual abuse, trafficking and female genital mutilation

The questions related to prostitution and the trafficking in women has gained prominence on the international agenda during the last years. Due to the geopolitical location of Finland as the border country of the European Union, prostitution has aroused great concern in the Scandinavian countries and in the EU. In the last ten years, the market has become larger, more international, more visible, and more organised. The profits of the trade are vast. The risks involved for the organisers are smaller than for drug trafficking, and the sanctions imposed by the criminal justice systems have so far been quite lenient.

Finland signed the UN Convention against Trans national Organised Crime and its optional Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons in December 2000. This so called Palermo protocol has four aims: prevention of trafficking in human beings; protection of victims with special consideration to their human rights; prosecution of offenders, and; promotion of international co-operation to meet these aims. The Protocol puts special focus on women and children.

The main ratification requirement of the Protocol is that States must criminalise trafficking in persons. Additionally, the EU Framework Decision of 2002 requires all member states to adopt legislation by August 1, 2004 that criminalises trafficking in persons for the purposes of labour and sexual exploitation. The minimum penalty for trafficking in persons must not be less than eight years' imprisonment in all EU member states.

Trafficking in women and prostitution were in Finland widely debated issues during the second half of 2002. Last year, Finland also participated in the Nordic Council of Ministers' Nordic-Baltic campaign against trafficking in women. We had seminars for authorities, organised an awareness-raising campaign targeted to sex buyers. I called together representatives of the media in the role of Minister of Health and social services and responsible for gender issues, together with my colleagues from the Ministries of Interior and Justice. As a result of the lively debate and the current international requirements, the Ministry of Justice appointed an inter-ministerial working group in the end of 2002 with the task of developing statutes concerning trafficking in persons.

Hopefully a new penal provision concerning aggravated procuring will be introduced. This will enable the police to use teletapping as an investigative measure. Experiences are gathered from other countries, as well as the current international trends in assessing whether buying sex can be criminalised. The Swedish experience is giving results. Unfortunately the prostitution is now transported to easier Finnish markets in the north.

In Finland, there is no specific paragraph in the penal code that criminalises trafficking in women. It seems that because the Finnish legislation does not identify trafficking in women as a specific form of crime, there have not to date been any recorded cases of trafficking in women in Finland. There are some legal provisions that can be used for these types of cases and for instance, the number of cases of procuring brought to the attention of the police has grown during the past years in Finland.

More international but also more national co-operation is needed so that the traffickers can be prosecuted in court, so that the victims can be helped and so that we can prevent the trafficking of women.

**A few years ago The United Nations estimated that 700 000 – 4000000 women and children will yearly end up as victims of trafficking.** In one of the wealthiest parts of the world, in Europe more than half a million girls and women are trafficked every year. The most important countries of origin are the Ukraine, Russia, Bulgaria, Rumania, Moldavia and Albania. In Europe women and children are caught within the sex trade, children also as beggars. According to some estimation even 70% of the persons hijacked to Albania are children.

The Balkans is a suitable place for criminal activities because of the lack of control of the and it is also claimed that the police closes its eyes to the action. There are also plenty of foreigners in the Balkans, both solders and civilians, who buy sex services and abuse minors sexually. In autumn 2001 the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) estimated that only in Kosovo there where 85 brothels, where the victims of trafficking were forced to prostitution. Today Sweden and Finland has become targets for the trafficked girls from the Baltic states.

To end this a lot has to change. The offenders have to be put responsible for their criminal and unethical actions but also the situation of the victims and the girl children in vulnerable conditions has to improve. The causes of wanting or having to leave their homes must be addressed. And there has to be decent conditions to turn back to. This is one very good reason for enhancing enlargement of the Union, that can help to bring about economical development and better social wellbeing.

At the moment the integration of the European Union is discussed in many fora. I understand well that many others than the EU-specialists don't have strength to follow the figures of the negotiations between the different institutions. I think that we should talk more about how the Union can full fill its meaning for every person: how we within the union can build a common responsibility and understanding between the citizens of the member states and thereby strengthen peace on our continent and promote health and social wellbeing both for women and men.

The principle of social responsibility has been one of the building pillars in the European identity. Europe – the old continent – has always been a predecessor when the discussion has concerned the welfare state, the welfare society or the social security; systems that secure the livelihood and the services of the citizens. Today the question is not about one social model common for the whole Europe, but about different challenges and objectives that unite different countries. These challenges and objectives have more common than distinctive elements.

**We can no longer separate social politics from the integration development.** The coordination of financial policy has become tighter during the last years. The member state's and the citizen's increasing co-operation and exchange of information also affect the social policies in the member states. The co-operation at the moment is called open co-ordination, through which EU-legislation is not created. The need of interaction and fusion becomes however more and more obvious, the straighter and tighter the citizen's contacts to different countries are. Similar problems in many questions also create a base for exchange of information and useful co-operation. Also the decisions made by the Court of Justice of the European Communities have effects on the social policies in different member states.

From the aspect of equality between men and women I think that our idea of individually based social welfare, could function as one model in the union, not the least in the new member states, which in a way now build their own social security systems from scratch. The Finnish social security system is, from its starting point, universal and tax financed - this means that we have a big amount of support models and services, which are directed towards the whole population. This model, which sometimes has been criticised for being expensive, has in international comparison proved itself to be very efficient and functioning.

OECD has compared the social net expenditures in different countries. This means that when social costs have been compared the OECD has in them included tax reductions, and disregarded that specific part of the subsidies, that are taxed. In this way social costs become more equally compatible.

Many support systems in the Nordic countries are, in contrast to other countries, financed through taxes. For example in Germany families are supported with tax reductions. Comparing public costs from this perspective, the social expenses in Finland are only a little higher than in the United States and very similar in the EU.

The enlargement of the EU and the different member's state's social security systems are challenges in themselves. In each member state we have to be able to secure a minimum level of social security, so that we with credibility can talk about a common union. When we support the candidate countries in their development to members of the Union I consider it very important that attention is especially drawn to the situation of children, questions concerning gender equality and minority policies.