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**“EU ENLARGEMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY”**

**PRESENTATION BY**

**KATJA TUOMINEN, ROMANIA TEAM, DG ENLARGEMENT, EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

**AT THE 6<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS OF THE EUROPEAN WOMEN LAWYERS ASSOCIATION**

**IN A WORKSHOP ON**

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**SUMMARY**

In the context of the enlargement policy, the Commission helps the transposition of the *acquis communautaire* in gender equality matters in the acceding, candidate and potential candidate countries of Western Balkans, and supports and monitors the implementation and effective enforcement of national legislation through the various instruments of the pre-accession strategy. Acceding countries must have put the legislation in place by the time of their accession. The full transposition and enforcement of all the EU Directives in the gender equality field is a strict condition for membership of the Union. However, the implementation of general policy aimed at promoting gender equality in a horizontal way can only be recommended and promoted (but not imposed) by the European Commission, mainly in the framework of the Copenhagen political criteria established in 1993.

Adoption and transposition of the *acquis communautaire* in itself is not, however, enough. It is vital to develop institutional and administrative structures that will facilitate the implementation and enforcement of equality rights, including through training of judges and cooperation with NGOs dealing with gender equality.

The fifth round of EU enlargement took place on 1 May 2004 with the accession of ten new Member States in the EU. Currently, the work on enlargement continues for the two acceding countries *Bulgaria* and *Romania*, for the three candidate countries *Turkey*, *Croatia* and the *former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)*, and for the potential candidate countries of *Western Balkans*. Work on gender equality focuses now on the situation of women in these countries, particularly where deficiencies have been noted like with Roma women, or with honour crimes in Turkey.

Implementation of legislation is regularly monitored by the Commission in the context of high-level meetings with the national authorities of these countries and within the framework of the annual progress reports on each country. Due attention to the issue of gender equality is paid also in the accession negotiations with Croatia and Turkey that were opened on 3 October 2005. This is done in the framework of the negotiating chapter “Social policy and employment”.

Moreover, pre-accession financial assistance is provided in different fields, among others to raise awareness on the Community’s gender equality policy, to transpose the required legislation and to strengthen the administrative capacity. Candidate countries can also be encouraged to participate in Community programmes, such as the one on gender equality (2001–2006) tackling gender inequalities in economic, political, civil and social life as well as gender roles and stereotypes. Also short-term technical assistance is provided. For example, in the context of training on equal opportunities, six specific seminars were organised in 2004–2005 to raise awareness in the field of gender equality. The issue of gender equality has also been touched upon in other more general seminars on social policy.

It has been generally recognised that the EU’s influence on adoption of legislation in the field of gender equality in the acceding and candidate countries has been tangible. However, this of course is insufficient, unless effective implementation is guaranteed on the ground. Therefore, the EU aims at stressing the gender equality dimension at different occasions with the authorities of the countries concerned and at taking it better into account also in project financing.