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EQUAL SOCIETIES:
For a Europe of Gender Equality and Empowered Women

2017 and 2018 were the years when women stood up globally and simultaneously and told the world that they have had enough: enough of being paid less than men for the same work; enough of not being free to decide about their own bodies; enough of being harassed and abused at work and beyond; enough of being made to stay at home and fulfil traditional roles.

It is indeed time to put an end to the persistent gap between women and men in terms of respecting human rights, access to opportunities and decision-making power. But women's rights have also experienced a massive backlash from neo-conservative, fundamentalist religious and right-wing populist forces and, in many cases, the persistent lack of adequate public services obliges women to stay at home as carers. PES Women and the PES are thus determined to stand by all women in the continuing fight to secure women's rights in the EU and beyond and to fight all types of discrimination and stereotypes against young girls from an early age on.

We want to advance gender equality across all fields and sectors by calling for an EU Gender Equality Strategy,

as promised by the European Commission and requested by the Council. The PES and PES Women therefore also call for the EU to implement gender budgeting when preparing the EU budget. Not only does the EU have to respect international obligations such as the UN 2030 agenda (ensuring a parity planet), but the EU has also a responsibility towards 52% of its citizens to ensure that women have an equal share politically, economically and socially. Therefore, we need to cooperate with neighbouring regions, international organisations and initiatives in order to exchange best practices, identify common fields of cooperation and develop synergies to support solidarity between women and to promote gender equality on an international level.

1. Stop Violence Against Women

The last year has shown us that the fight for women's rights is, at its core, a fight for women's safety. With the growth in the #metoo movement, thousands of women spoke out about the physical and mental violence they face every day at home, at work, in public places and in our communities, and mobilised against it. The number of women affected who made their stories heard shows how urgently we need political action to ensure that all women can participate equally in all parts of society without fearing harassment and violence.

One in three women in the EU has experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15[1]. This demonstrates that we must combat all forms of violence that affect women, including domestic violence, sexual violence and rape, human trafficking, female genital mutilation, sexual harassment, forced marriage and so-called honour crimes. This includes tackling psychological violence, together with stalking, verbal abuse in public places and the internet as well as fighting pornographic objectification of women and their negative display in sexist advertisements. Moreover, decision-makers and society as

[1] http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-results-glance

a whole must find comprehensive solutions, not only to end the trivialisation of such acts through education programmes and awareness-raising, but also finally to end the impunity of perpetrators and to shift towards dissuasion and criminalisation through legislation and effective policies.

The PES and PES Women urge all EU Member States to ratify and implement the Istanbul Convention, which was introduced by the Council of Europe in 2011 to make Europe a safer place for all women by recognising multiple forms of gender-based violence, taking measures to prevent it, protect victims and prosecute perpetrators. Ratifying the Istanbul Convention and implementing it in national legislation is the only way forward for Europe to guarantee the protection and safety of all women, girls and vulnerable groups in Europe, including refugee women, migrants and LGBTI people arriving to Europe. The EU and its Member States need to step up their actions to eradicate sexual and gender-based violence, to eliminate the power imbalance between women and men, and to respect, advocate and implement women's rights across policy fields.

2. My Body, My Rights

Denying women's free choice over their own body or denying their access to any type of medical care, undermines the promotion and respect of their fundamental freedoms and rights. Banning abortion, or making it nearly impossible for a woman to access safe abortion, has never prevented it from happening. Instead, it makes women's lives more difficult and dangerous by forcing them either to resort at home to backdoor procedures that put their health and lives at risk, or to travel to another state where legal termination procedures are available. Therefore, we urgently need to allocate more resources to, and prioritise, education, infrastructure and awareness-raising about sexual and reproductive health and rights, linking these to women's social economic empowerment and independence. There should be a stronger focus on prevention and comprehensive sexuality education for all adolescents, young girls and boys inside and outside of school. This will equip them, including in rural areas, with better knowledge to make decisions about their own bodies, health and lives and to manage healthy sexual and social relationships. At the same time, promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights must be a norm, including the access to affordable, safe and legal abortion for all women throughout the EU. We want sexual and reproductive health and rights to be included in the EU Health Programme. Every country should offer access to affordable contraceptives and support services for women. The PES and PES Women will continue fighting for these rights in all countries and we must support pan-European initiatives, such as the AllofUs[1] platform, that counteract misinformation.

3. Close the Gender Gaps

Despite the slow but steady progress made towards gender equality over the past decade, 2017 was not a success. In fact, the gap between women and men across health, education, politics and economics widened for the first time since records began in 2006.[2] The EU must reverse this trend and become the frontrunner in empowering women and girls and giving them a fair share in decision-making authorities, starting by closing the gender pay gap and its underlying causes. With a European Gender Pay Gap at 16% and a European Pension Gap at 39%, PES Women and the PES will continue calling for clear and binding targets (2 percentage points each year, per Member State, per

[1] https://twitter.com/joinallofus

[2] https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2017

age group), a European Pay Gap Audit, transparency grids, an Equal Pay Label, and dissuasive sanctions for non-compliance. PES and PES Women call the EU and all Member States to eliminate the gender pay gap by 2030.

Furthermore, the EU must ensure that women and men can have an equal and fairly balanced approach towards sharing paid and unpaid work

(such as care responsibilities). A more ambitious European legal framework, such as that envisaged by the Work-Life Balance Directive, would enable the EU and its Member States to eliminate the underlying causes of the pay gap, including situations where women are forced into part-time work or career breaks. The lack of leave schemes and infrastructures - like affordable and high-quality childcare facilities for all children from birth to schooling age and care services for dependent people, that would allow women and men to combine work and life responsibilities - lead towards continuous gender segregation in lower-paid sectors (which begins at a very young age) and maintaining the glass ceiling. In addition, specific measures to provide active support to women's employment are needed such as formal and non-formal education and programmes that encourage young people to opt for jobs free from any gender bias, while guaranteeing living wages and decent active ageing. Loopholes in national tax-systems need to be bridged to reduce economic inequalities between women and men. Moreover, Europe urgently needs to increase and guarantee the political participation of women and foster equality role-models for young girls in all sectors through targeted actions. Europe needs to encourage national and European parties and institutions to reach parity democracy, and to develop more gender-sensitive political programs.

To achieve these objectives and to challenge and change gender norms, gender mainstreaming remains crucial, as it concerns the society as a whole. Therefore, an intersectional approach of gender equality is inevitable. Every step in the policy-making process needs to consider gender representation and gender responsive contents, including gender budgeting. This said, we must hold the EU and its Member States accountable and safeguard the financing of women's movements' projects such as through the new Daphne Programme. Only through this can we achieve an equal and active representation of 52% of the world's population, so that women not only gain power but also own it to reach sustainable gender equality.

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