



Council of European Municipalities and Regions

European Section of United Cities and Local Governments

Speech by Ewa Samuelsson, Chair of CEMR's standing committee for equality during the seminar "Gender Equality - local actions bringing real change", at the European Parliament (Brussels), 3 March 2015:

I am very happy that so many have gathered here today to participate in our seminar to discuss the important issue of equality of women and men and especially the essential role of local and regional governments in this matter. But at the same time, I am sad that, in this context on the International Women's Day, we still have to celebrate women's contribution to the society and review the progress achieved thus far.

Despite significant progress during last decades we know that gender equality is still far from being achieved. To give you a few examples: **in Europe today only around 14 % of the Mayors are women, 22 % of women have experience physical or sexual violence and the gender pay gap remains at an overall level of 16 %**. We also face new challenges; the economic crisis has severely affected many countries in Europe and austerity measures have particularly affected women with cuts in the welfare sector. Moreover, the current democratic change also requires new adapted solutions.

These are all reasons to why we, as representatives of local and regional governments, European institutions and organisations working on European level, must ensure that we keep this question on top of our political agendas. There is a need for more **inclusive policies** adapted to the needs of **all citizens** and advancing equality of women and men is a key in this work.

The new European Commission has set employment as one of the main priorities. However, we will never reach the objective of 75 % employment rate, especially not among women, without putting this issue into a larger context also making sure that we provide good childcare, elderly care and favouring reconciliation of private and working life. All of these issues **are closely linked to the daily work of local and regional authorities**, and areas for which the **European Charter for Equality** propose concrete measures for intervention.

Many cities and regions within our network are implementing activities to enhance gender equality. However, we see a need for support, guidance, coordination, further awareness-raising, sharing experience and monitoring at European level in order to ensure continuity and real progress in this work. Otherwise there is a risk that these initiatives will slow down or even disappear.

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In this context, I am very pleased to be here today in my position as Chair of the Standing Committee for Equality, to present how our organisation, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) is working in this field. I am especially proud to present the **outcomes of the Observatory**, a project launched thanks to the financial contribution from the former Swedish government through CEMR's Swedish association, the Swedish Association of local authorities and Regions (SALAR).

Today, I will present three initiatives launched by CEMR in order to promote equality of women and men at local and regional level, namely (1) *the European Charter for Equality*, (2) *the Observatory* and (3) *its indicators* that we have recently developed in a contract with the European Commission. I am also going to talk about the conclusions we have drawn from our work and look into the future. In this perspective, I am looking forward to exchange with you on how we further can develop our work at European level together with the support from a variety of organisations and representatives from European institutions in order to join our forces to work together for this important issue.

The European Charter for Equality

CEMR launched the European Charter for Equality of women and men in local life in 2006 with the purpose to encourage local and regional government to take a public commitment for gender equality and also to create a common framework for equality work at local and regional level in Europe.

The Charter was elaborated in collaboration with our member associations in different countries in the context of a project financed by the European Commission. The Charter does not only present basic rights but also include, in its 30 articles, as I previously mentioned, concrete examples of actions that local and regional government can implement in their different areas of activities such as *political representation, urban planning and in their role as employers*, in order to enhance equality of women and men.

With help from CEMR's national associations, the Charter has been promoted in different countries and counts today **almost 1500 signatories in 32 European countries**.

However, since the launch of the Charter, signatories have requested further support and guidance on how to implement the Charter.

The Observatory of the European Charter

In order to respond to this demand CEMR decided to launch the Observatory of the European Charter for Equality. I am pleased to say that thanks to the engagement of the former Swedish government, our association, SALAR - in particular its President Mr Anders Knape - and my personal engagement in this position as Chair of the CEMR Standing Committee, we made it possible to launch the Observatory in March 2012. It was the ambition of SALAR and also my personal wish, to strengthen our work on the Charter, increase its visibility, to mobilise signatories to take further actions to implement it at local level and to share information and experience.

The Observatory has now been monitoring the implementation of the Charter for three years and has managed, with support from the network of CEMR's member associations, to create a solid

platform of exchange for signatories; especially through the launch of the website www.charter-equality.eu. We have managed to get a good overview on the situation of the work with the Charter in different countries, gathered examples of good practices and action plans available on the website. We had planned to show you some of examples of good practices at the exhibition here today but unfortunately we had to cancel it due to the current security rules here in the Parliament. However, we hope that we will be able to organise this at a later occasion and we will keep you informed about this and hope that you will be able to join us then.

Pilot project on developing indicators

It is also thanks to the work started in the framework of the Observatory, that CEMR was given the assignment by the European Commission to develop indicators that will allow signatories to monitor the implementation of the Charter. Together with the Consultancy Agency ICF and the Basque University in Spain, CEMR has now developed a **final list of 76 indicators** that are currently being disseminated among signatories. We are looking forward to present the outcomes of this monitoring at a final conference that will be held here in Brussels in October 2015.

Future activities

Before concluding, let me emphasise the importance of the work carried out by the FEMM Committee in bringing gender equality to the forefront of European politics and debates. CEMR and its member associations consider the FEMM Committee a crucial partner of local government. We look forward to continuing our close dialogue with you and other key partners in the years ahead. To conclude I would like to address 3 key messages here today:

- 1) First, I would like to thank for the support provided by European Institutions to elaborate the Charter and its indicators, enabling us to create a **common framework and platform for exchange** on European level for local and regional authorities. However, we also **call for further support** from European institutions for our work to ensure **continuity and progress**.
- 2) Secondly, I would like to address the **lack of gender-disaggregated data**, especially on local and regional level and the need for further support to **gathering data** and **dissemination of tools for monitoring** our work.
- 3) Third, we call for **further recognition** of the vital role of local and regional governments in promoting equality of women and men. In this perspective, I would like to stress our willingness to **contribute to the shaping of the “EU Strategy for equality between women and men post 2015”** that is currently being prepared by the European Parliament and the European Commission.

As I already mentioned in the beginning of my speech, I truly believe that advancing equality of women and men is a key for tackling the challenges we face in Europe today. However, we cannot solve these challenges without adopting a bottom-up approach starting from local level. In this perspective, I hope that I have been able to provide you with a good overview on how we at CEMR contribute to promoting gender equality. Thank you and I look forward to a fruitful discussion.