

Stockholm, Paris, Madrid, Helsinki,  
Prague, Copenhagen, 9 February 2006

H E Mr Wolfgang Schüssel  
Federal Chancellor of the Republic of Austria  
Vienna

Mr Chancellor,

The EU informal summit at Hampton Court on 27 October 2005 identified a number of key priorities to prepare the European Union for the challenges and opportunities of globalisation. There was broad agreement on the need for new impetus in a number of areas, including with regard to ageing populations and the need for increased labour market participation.

It is clear that further efforts are required to attain the goals of the Lisbon Strategy. Policies are needed that effectively respond to the challenges of economic and demographic change at both European and national level. Key among them must be measures to ensure that the productive potential of the European labour force is fully put to use.

Ensuring that women and men can participate equally and fully in the labour market and contribute to society at large will be vital for the maintenance of a competitive and prosperous Europe. Policies to promote women's employment and to ensure opportunities for both women and men to combine professional and private life are therefore crucial.

Against this background we (the undersigned) propose a European Pact for Gender Equality. The Pact for Gender Equality should serve to enhance women's participation in the labour market and to promote equality between women and men. The Pact should build on already existing objectives, targets and instruments within the Lisbon process, the integrated guidelines for growth and jobs, and the Roadmap for future EU gender equality policies. Thus, no new processes or financial instruments are required.

In general terms, its objectives should be :

- i) to contribute to fulfilling EU ambitions on gender equality in the treaty (Article 2 and Article 3(2) of the EC Treaty),
- ii) to facilitate the full use of the productive potential of the European labour force and close the gender gaps in employment and social protection,

- iii) to meet the demographic challenges by promoting better work-life balance for women and men.

Relevant measures could include:

*Measures to close gender gaps and combat gender stereotypes in the labour market*

- promote women's employment in all age brackets and reduce gender gaps in employment;
- equal pay for equal work;
- combat gender stereotypes, in particular those related to the sex-segregated labour market and in education;
- consider how to make welfare systems more women's employment friendly;
- promote women's empowerment in political and economic life and women's entrepreneurship;
- address the situation and conditions of women facing multiple discrimination with a view to promote their full and equal participation in the labour market;
- promote the quality of jobs, including working conditions, security and health for both women and men in working life, access to lifelong learning and career prospects;
- encourage social partners and enterprises to develop initiatives in favour of gender equality and promote gender equality plans at the workplace;
- mainstreaming the gender perspective into all public activities.

*Measures to promote a better work-life balance for all*

- achieve the objectives set at the European Council in Barcelona in March 2002 on the provision of childcare facilities;
- improve the provision of care facilities for other dependents;
- promote parental leave for both women and men;
- exchange experience and good practice between Member States on policies to promote reconciliation of private life and work for both women and men.


*Measures to reinforce governance through gender mainstreaming and better monitoring*

- ensure that gender equality effects are taken into account when impact assessment of new EU policies and legal proposals are being made;
- further develop statistics and indicators disaggregated by sex;
- strengthen the role of the Annual Report on Equality between Women and Men in the follow up of the implementation of the Lisbon Process;
- fully utilise opportunities presented by the establishment of the European Institute for Gender Equality.

The Pact for Gender Equality should be linked to the established follow-up mechanisms of the Lisbon strategy, taking into account the European Youth Pact, and aim to promote the implementation of gender mainstreaming in actions taken within the strategy. When reporting on the implementation of their National Reform Programmes for Growth and Jobs, Member States could be encouraged to include a perspective of gender equality, especially concerning Guideline 18. The Commission and the Council could be invited to do likewise in the Annual Progress Report on the Lisbon strategy.

In submitting these ideas to you, Mr Chancellor, as well as to the President of the Commission, we suggest that they be reflected in the agenda of the Spring European Council. Our officials remain at the disposal of the Presidency and the Commission for any preparatory work intended to fulfil that aim.

A copy of this letter will be sent to all members of the European Council.



Göran Persson  
Prime Minister of Sweden



Jacques Chirac  
President of the French Republic



José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero  
President of the Government of Spain



Matti Vanhanen  
Prime Minister of Finland



Jiří Paroubek  
Prime Minister of the Czech Republic



Anders Fogh Rasmussen  
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