



EURO-MEDITERRANEAN HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK
RÉSEAU EURO-MÉDITERRANÉEN DES DROITS DE L'HOMME
الشبكة الأوروبية - المتوسطية لحقوق الإنسان

EMHRN STATEMENT

5 December 2011

The EMHRN urges the European Union to fully integrate gender equality in the "renewed ENP policy" with its Southern Neighbours

During a 3-day mission to the EU institutions¹ in Brussels on 21-23 November 2011, a delegation of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) composed of representatives of women's rights organisations from Egypt, Morocco, Algeria and Jordan, voiced serious concerns that Gender Equality is almost absent in the new EU approach towards its Neighbouring countries² and stressed the lack of gender mainstreaming of this approach.

The EMHRN delegation regretted that, in its definition, the EU concept of "deep democracy" failed to enshrine women's rights and full equal participation of women. The delegation further denounced that the concept showcased no clear benchmarks to tackle the pivotal role of women's equal political participation in terms of democratic transition. It urged the EU to redress this gap which was acknowledged by several EU officials and to add gender equality in the "deep democracy" criteria in future EU statements or Conclusions and at the implementation stage.

Following the meetings the Council underlined in its Conclusions of 1 December (add reference in footnote) that "women's rights, gender equality and women's participation in the political process are essential components of a democratic society and important for inclusive economic development". The EMHRN welcomes this step and calls on the EU to translate this statement into concrete action and gender mainstreaming at all levels of relations with South Mediterranean countries, including political dialogues, ENP progress reports, actions plans, benchmarks, programs and criteria for the EU "more for more" approach. In meetings with representatives of the EU institutions, members of the EMHRN delegation explained the situation of gender-based discrimination and gave an overview of the situation of women and the obstacles to their active participation in these countries, with a particularly sharp focus on times of political transition and reforms.

¹ Meetings with European External Action Service, European Parliament, European Commission and EU Member States' representatives.

² "A new response to a changing Neighborhood" issued by the High Representative of the Union for the Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European Commission in May 2011

More specifically, the delegation members detailed the situation of Algerian women who are being subjected to discriminatory laws (i.e. the family law and other laws) and who are underrepresented both in the public and political spheres. Independent Algerian women's rights organisations are also regularly hindered when they are trying to hold in-country activities due to the lack of freedom of association and assembly in the country.

As far as Egyptian women are concerned, the delegation updated EU officials on the systematic marginalisation of women's participation in the political transition process. The delegation also emphasised the fact that gender equality, non-discrimination and positive actions were nowhere to be seen on the agenda of the current transitional government. Recent cases of female demonstrators who went through virginity tests ordered by the Egyptian police (an act that qualifies as sexual abuse), have been documented by the media and strongly condemned by the international civil society.

Furthermore, human rights organisations operating in Egypt are harassed and subjected to dense defamation campaigns due to their documenting and publicising of human rights violations by the Security Council of Armed Forces.

With regards to the Jordanian situation, the delegation highlighted that no explicit gender equality was mentioned in the new constitutional amendments that took place recently in Jordan. While women were underrepresented in the National Dialogue Committee, not a single woman was to be found in the composition of the Royal Committee for Constitution Amendments. Jordanian women married to foreigners organised many sit-ins in front of the Parliament during the last months, in protest against discrimination in relation to passing on their nationality to their husbands and children, in a bid to claim their rights as full citizens. The Delegation members note that this is also a problem in some other countries of the region.

In Morocco, the Constitution put to referendum in July 2011 enshrines equality between women and men in terms of their civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights, and reasserts the State's commitment to attaining male-female parity.

However, the first implementation of the egalitarian provisions related to political participation, stemming from the organic law on the Chamber of Representatives, has already failed in this regard with women representing a mere 16% of the new Parliament elected on 25 November. We thus remain far from the 30% quota and from true male-female parity. The lack of harmonization between the provisions of the organic laws and the provisions of the Constitution beg the question of whether there is a real willingness to implement the Constitution. Moreover, the family code, penal code, and work code all continue to constitute a discriminatory approach with regards to women's rights and their full and entire participation to public life.

In conclusion, the EMHRN urges the High Representative of the Union for the Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, EU Member States and the European Commission to step up their support for women's rights and gender equality in the Mediterranean region based on commitments taken by all euro-Mediterranean countries in the 2006 Istanbul and 2009 Marrakech Ministerial Conferences on Strengthening the role of women in society³.

In particular, the EMHRN exhorts the EU to comply with the following:

³ http://www.eeas.europa.eu/euromed/women/docs/2009_11_conference_en.pdf

1. Systematically integrating gender equality as a guiding principle in all aspects of its bilateral relations with countries of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean region.
2. Systematically mainstreaming the gender dimension across follow-up and implementation of the EU's "*new response to a changing Neighborhood*"
3. Explicitly add equal participation of women in political and public life in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) "deep democracy" benchmarks
4. Including gender related benchmarks in the EU annual country progress reports on which EU support will be based as well as all revised or future ENP Action Plans, such as: constitutionalisation of gender equality and non discrimination based on gender, lifting of reservations to CEDAW, signing of CEDAW Protocol, abolishing discriminatory articles, establishing parity in electoral laws and processes and other positive actions oriented towards the promotion of gender equality and the eradication of gender-based discrimination.

Contacts:

In Amman:

Lina Al Qurah

Director of the Gender project

E-mail: lqu@euromedrights.net

In Brussels:

Sandrine Grenier

Advocacy Director

Tel : 00 32 / (0)2 513 37 97

Email: sgr@euromedrights.net