

**Speech by Prof Marija Aušrinė PAVILIONIENĖ**

**Member of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, Chair of the Women's Parliamentary Group**

**Meeting of the Chairpersons of the Committees on Foreign Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union and the Parliamentary Forum for Democracy**

**Vilnius, 27-28 November 2013**

**Democracy and Gender Equality**

I will speak on the topic “Democracy and Gender Equality” and start from the title of the conference “Parliaments for democracy: towards more ambitious global cooperation“.

When politicians discuss neighbourhood relationships between the European Union and the countries in transition, the developing countries and the ties in foreign policy, security, financial and economic affairs, the phrase “ambitious cooperation“ is clear and understandable.

But when politicians touch upon the theme of gender equality, an equal opportunities policy, the wording ”ambitious cooperation” seems to be as if out of place. Why is it so?

It is so because politicians, discussing gender equality, often use many abstract words. We all know that **democracy is not possible without gender equality**. We all know that **gender equality is the human right, which should be respected, cherished and protected, as all human rights are to be**. But reality is quite different.

The discourse of statistical data comparison shows the vastness of gender inequality in the world, in the European Union, outside the Union and the countries in transition. More than 50 per cent of the world’s population is female. But not even 20 per cent of political representatives are women. In the developing countries 150 000 women and 1.6 million children die each year between the outset of labour and 48 hours after birth due to the lack of elementary reproductive health and child care services. 215 million women in developing countries have unmet need for family planning – in these countries contraceptive use is low. **There is a direct link between reproductive choice and participation in decision-making.**

Women’s earnings are lower than men’s by approximately 18 per cent in the EU. Women spend 80 per cent of their lifetime on family caring activities, while men spend only 20 per cent. Only 22.3 per cent of women are in the EU parliaments. There are too few women in the highest positions and decision-making spheres. Only 7 out of 150 elected heads of state and 11 out of 192 heads of government are women. Too few women are on the boards of institutions and enterprises. 40 per cent of gender quotas on the boards to conservatively thinking individuals seem to be the end of the world. It is not the end. It is just the beginning of gender equality processes. There is no way back

to feudal or patriarchal societies. There is only a way forward. To women's freedom. To gender equality.

The Treaty of Rome of 1957 laid the foundations of the EU. There is the statement of equality there, "equal pay for equal work". 56 years have passed since the Treaty was signed. But gender equality processes have been very slow, although during this time many international conventions, directives, action programmes have been adopted, which protect women from all kinds of discrimination. Gender equality laws have also been passed, but patriarchal mentality, stereotypical gender roles, gender segregation, violence against women, children marriages, forced marriages, mutilation of women's bodies, negation of reproductive rights, lack of sex education, reproductive health and youth friendly services and homophobia still are the wounds of the modern world.

**Gender inequality is a modern slavery. Gender inequality is a shame of modern society.**

**Gender equality is not only a women's problem. It is a men's problem too.** Gender equality and equal opportunities policies open wide possibilities to both – men and women – to reveal their intellectual, emotional, creative potential for the welfare of society; to stop environmental damage, women's poverty, women's and children's mortality, violence against women. To create peace and security for the mankind.

Let's answer the following questions: Who wage wars and local conflicts in patriarchal societies? Men do. Who was the cause of the global financial crisis? Men were. Who spread religious hatred? Men do. Who have used chemical weapons against their own innocent people? Men have. Are the snipers, killing children and pregnant women, men or women? They are men. Who rape and kill girls and women? Men do. The list can be continued.

In order not to be blamed any more for cruelties and aggression, for gender misbalance in society, **men should start creating gender equality themselves** and get rid of the myths of masculinity, which glorify them as the only rulers of the world, the best, the smartest, the strongest sex. Men pay their health and life for those masculinity myths.

Both sexes are to share the responsibilities of the future of the world, of our societies, because we are all human beings and have the same civil rights.

Time has come to say the truth: do not hide behind national traditions and prejudices; do not hide behind national education, culture, health care and social care systems; do not hide behind religious dogmas. They might be the obstacles to the gender equality progress.

Time has come to have the skeleton of universal European gender equality education, sex education, which would break up gender stereotypes, induce respect for men and women. Men and women should strive to build up their own personalities first, and then share responsibility of household duties, family care, motherhood and fatherhood duties. And the state should consistently and systematically help individuals to combine family and professional life.

Lithuania is proud to have established the first Women's Studies Centre in the post-soviet Baltic republics, to have set up the first feminist library, the first gender research journal and the first office of Ombudsman of Equal Opportunities in the Baltic States, to have very active women's

NGOs and politicians, who are aware of gender equality, and women leaders – the President of the Republic of Lithuania and the Speaker of the Lithuanian Parliament. Lithuania is proud that Vilnius has been chosen as the quarters for the European Institute for Gender Equality because of its gender equality movement. Lithuania is proud to have started COSAC women's section during its Presidency of the Council of the EU. But there is much to do in Lithuania in the sphere of gender equality – patriarchal mentality still prevails, religious fundamentalists attempt to interfere into politics, education and science.

Men and women politicians are to learn what gender equality and equal opportunities are. **The European Institute for Gender Equality** has undertaken the noble task of pointing out that **gender equality is a common goal, and gender mainstreaming is a strategy, that men should stop being gender blind, gender conservative. They are to be gender aware, apply gender aspects to all spheres of social life. That both – men and women – are to be gender redistributive and attempt at creating gender balance in modern society, i.e. 50 per cent and 50 per cent of each sex, fully and equally participating in the world's management. This is a dream of Hillary Clinton. This is a dream of every intellectually awakened woman. This should become a reality of the 21st century. Without this reality it is too early to speak about genuine democracy because the modern world is still cruelly crippled by gender inequality. The task of politicians is to heal the crippled world – for the first time in human history.**