



**UNITEE**

European-Turkish Business Confederation

## **ENTREPRENEURIAL AND PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGES FOR NEW EUROPEAN WOMEN**

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*UNITEE is an international not-for-profit confederation constituting the largest organisation of immigrant entrepreneurs, immigrant SMEs, and immigrant business professionals in Europe. Concerned with the particular difficulties that New European Women – women of a migrant background – encounter when starting up or expanding their business activities, UNITEE has launched a series of conferences with the aim of strengthening women business leadership in the EU.*

*On the 16<sup>th</sup> of May, 2013, the second conference of its kind was organised on the premises of the European Parliament. A colourful panel representing all spheres of society, from the legislative and executive branches of politics to civil society, academia and the business community, came together to discuss how to overcome the most burdensome challenges that New European women entrepreneurs face in today's Europe.*

Currently, y 34.4% of women in Europe are self-employed and only 6% own a business. This is considerably less than their male counterparts. In addition to this under-representation of women in the world of business, New European women encounter *cumulative barriers* due to their cultural backgrounds. The conference was an opportunity to discuss difficulties such as “the glass ceiling”; stereotypes related to gender and culture; and the burden of having a career and family simultaneously.

The event was hosted by MEP **Ms Emine Bozkurt** and gathered more than a hundred participants at the European Parliament. Aspiring female entrepreneurs from different countries came to discuss challenges and opportunities for business start-ups in Europe. Thanks to an impressive panel of speakers, the event was a moment of inspiration and insight for all participants.

Speakers:

- **Ms Emine Bozkurt**, MEP (S&D)**Dr Aşkın Asan** , Turkish Deputy Minister of Family and Social Policies
- **Dr Adem Kumcu**, President of UNITEE
- **Ms Agnès Hubert**, Bureau of European Policy Advisers, European Commission
- **Dr Caroline Essers**, Expert on Entrepreneurship from a socio-cultural perspective, Radboud University
- **Ms Tanya Mann Rennick**, Networking Entrepreneur and Founder of The Oyster Club
- **Ms Suzan Kizilaslan**, Entrepreneur, Trillions & Partner

The host of the event, MEP **Ms Emine Bozkurt**, welcomed the audience by expressing her concern for gender equality in the EU. Ms Bozkurt stated that “the European Parliament is very engaged in projects to encourage women entrepreneurs”. **Dr Adem Kumcu** insisted that the battle for women's integration is one to be fought by all stakeholders of the society that we wish to build. “At UNITEE we refuse to envisage a gender fight, and see instead a common opportunity, a gender alliance.”

### **The Importance of Women Networks**

**Ms Emine Bozkurt** had the opportunity to speak about the situation in the Netherlands. Dutch women-held businesses are smaller and earn less, and have therefore fewer opportunities to build networks. She insisted on the need for experienced women entrepreneurs to establish stronger business networks in order to create new trends. “We cannot expect governments to do everything. We need to act ourselves.” **Ms Bozkurt** also stressed the role that business organizations play in this matter. For instance, they could increase their efforts aimed at achieving

gender balance on their boards.

**Dr Caroline Essers** agreed with the ideas of Mr Bozkurt and encouraged the attendees to join their efforts in strategic networking. Particularly in the start-up phase, the entrepreneur is in urgent need of a solid support system. Along with **Ms Suzan Kizilaslan**, she emphasised the necessity for women entrepreneurs to be able to access finance, coaching and networking opportunities. The personal experience of **Ms Kizilaslan** demonstrates the truth of this. Having faced great difficulties in accessing public financing, Ms Kizislan had to rely completely on family and friends in the start-up phase of her own business. In spite of this support, she said male entrepreneurs refused to take her seriously. “Many men do not think that women can be successful self-employers.”

### **Deconstructing the Entrepreneurial Archetype**

Having conducted long-standing research in the area of migrant women entrepreneurship, **Dr Caroline Essers** highlighted the great difficulties of being an entrepreneur, a Muslim and a woman, all at the same time. The activity of entrepreneurship is closely associated with an entrepreneurial archetype – white; Western and male. To this date, **Dr Essers** claimed, there is a strong dichotomy between being a mother and an entrepreneur.

There is very little research data on migrant businesswomen. So far, research has focused on either the gender-entrepreneurship or ethnicity-entrepreneurship relations. Little research has been done, however, on the intersectionality of the migrant businesswomen community.

According to existing research, however, only 25% of migrant entrepreneurs in Netherlands are female. For entrepreneurs of Turkish origin, this number is only 17%. What these businesses have in common is the fact that they are smaller companies, which are also less likely to be taken seriously. They are also very specialised: Turkish and Moroccan female entrepreneurs are often associated with service-related female-migrant niches. **Dr Essers** pointed out that New European Woman entrepreneurs are not only subject to prejudices by Dutch society, but often experience difficulties in combining gender, ethnic and entrepreneurial identities within their own migrant community.

To fight against the predominance of the entrepreneurial archetype, **Dr Essers** suggested measures that could be taken by government authorities. First of all, she called for more attention from politicians and scientists. “These New Europeans Women's economic independence and contribution to society is nothing to neglect.” Secondly, school projects can serve as an important tool to raise awareness and kill stereotypes. Last but not least, well-functioning childcare systems, coaching and mentoring from Chambers of Commerce should be developed.

## A Increasing Awareness of Gender Stakes in Turkey

“Turkey is a fantastic model for Europeans to believe in their future and to fight for it,” Dr Kumcu stated as he gave the floor to **Dr Aşkın Asan**, the Turkish Deputy Minister of Family and Social Policies. She started off by stressing the importance of gender inclusion for Turkey's economic growth: “Turkey is expected to have the biggest growth among OECD countries by 2016. These ambitions cannot be reached if we leave women behind.”

Indeed, the Turkish labour force has all the characteristics of a young, dynamic and well-educated population. In spite of this, women's rate of participation in the Turkish labour force is less than 30 %, constituting a neglected potential for the Turkish economy. The Survey for Status of Women in Office reveals that women represented 36% of total employment (45% of white-collar employees, 10% of blue-collar employees).

The principle of equality between women and men, though strengthened by numerous amendments to the Turkish Constitution, is not enough, according to **Dr Asan**. A more proactive approach, involving vocational training, financial and micro-financial support, has been adopted by the Turkish government. Financial support programmes are being implemented, and business development centres are being opened by the Administration for Development and Promotion of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (KOSGEB), with the goal of promoting women entrepreneurship. In addition to this, leading NGOs and private sector organizations are joining forces with the government to increase the access to and the supply of child care services.

## Empowering Women to create Growth and Jobs

**Ms Agnès Hubert**, Policy Adviser at the European Commission introduced the policy perspective of the European Commission as she described how EU measures, such as the *Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2015-2020* and the *Small Business Act of 2008*, can enhance a paradigm shift towards a more equal and just Europe. “It is about creating growth and jobs through the empowerment of women”, she stated. For the moment, women stand for only 30 % of business start-ups. **Ms Hubert** identified a lack of confidence and support as the most pressing challenges for women entrepreneurs.

These difficulties were very well known to **Ms Suzan Kizilaslan** and **Ms Tanya Mann Rennick**, two living examples of women entrepreneurs who refused to concede defeat. **Ms Tanya Mann Rennick** recounted the inspiring story of how she created a social enterprise to help the London's poor. She convinced her audience that “if your heart is in it you can do anything“. **Ms Kizilaslan** hopes that with a change of mentalities in Europe, women will get more and more access to the world of business.

**Ms Rennick** was referring to the economic crisis when she insisted that: “We are now in a new

feminine age, where men and women must work together to bring positive change. In the world of business”, she continued, “women entrepreneurs can become crucial *change agents*, bringing a fresh new female touch to our companies.

*UNITEE wishes to thank all participants for their valuable contribution to the event.*

#### **DID YOU KNOW?**

*UNITEE has launched a women’s platform named NEWEL - New European Women Entrepreneurs and Leaders Platform, adding a new element to its overall organisation. The platform was created in order to offer women from diverse backgrounds a wide variety of services ranging from:*

- *networking opportunities, where members can exchange ideas and tips on entrepreneurship*
- *coaching and guiding, in the form of meeting role models and mentors*
- *conferences and workshops, such as UNITEEs Women Conference Series*
- *EU level advocacy for women entrepreneurs and business professionals*

*NEWEL intends to unite New European women in one stable and structured umbrella organisation. Together with our national federations, UNITEE will form the first Europe wide business platform for New European women. A selected board of advisors consisting of successful female entrepreneurs and professionals, as well as experts, will advise UNITEE’s board of directors on all issues related to NEWEL and our involvement in gender equality.*

#### **PRESS & FURTHER INFORMATION:**

Please contact:

Rebecka Allén

Public Relations Manager

Phone (office): +32 (0)2 204 05 33

Phone (mobile ): 04 88 02 47 75

E-mail: [rallen@unitee.eu](mailto:rallen@unitee.eu)

#### **FURTHER MATERIAL:**

<http://www.unitee.eu/unitee-activities/a-focus-on-the-entrepreneurial-challenges-of-new-european-women>