



UNITEE
New European Business Confederation



CONFERENCE REPORT

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY AT WORK

Introduction

On 11 December 2014, **UNITEE, the New European Business Confederation**, and **CESI, the European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions** organised the lunch time debate “**Breaking Down Barriers: Towards Gender Equality at Work**”.

With the new term of the European Commission beginning to take shape and in the midst of preparations for the Commission’s work programme in full flow, now is the time for stakeholders to open up with their expectations. What can be done at the EU level to move towards gender equality at work by breaking down both structural and cultural barriers?

The conference aimed to look at where the private sector and public sector can learn from each other. How can SMEs ensure a better work-life balance and flexible working



conditions, key factors for attracting female employees? What can be done more than simply raising awareness of the need for more women in work? Are quotas encouraging women to lead the way? Is Europe on course to closing the

gender-pay gap? What is the role of men in gender equality? To discuss these questions, **UNITEE** and **CESI** brought together a diverse panel of speakers to draw on both national and European experiences of addressing the challenges facing gender equality in the workplace.

The panel included:

- **Kerstin BORN-SIRKEL**, Director at the Centre for European Policy Studies
- **Philippe KERAUDREN**, Head of Unit Reflective Societies – DG Research and Innovation
- **Fiona O'MALLEY**, Senior Manager in the Financial Sector
- **Arnd BECKERS**, Policy Adviser at CESI

Viviane TEITELBAUM, President of the European Women's Lobby, moderated the event.

In his opening speech **Adem KUMCU** stressed the economic benefits of a diverse workforce. Gender, as well as cultural diversity, are key assets when it comes to innovation and competitiveness. SMEs still have a lot of work to do in realising this potential. Addressing UNITEE's members directly, he called for a more inclusive recruitment process and highlighted once again the enormous human capital that is being represented by women. Having had a role model in his own hard-working and determined mother, Mr KUMCU grew up to see women as equals. Shamefully, today still, this equality in all levels of society and the labour market has not yet been



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I'm happy to see people fighting
for equality,
but that's a shame
to still have to do this in the 21st
century.

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Adem KUMCU

achieved. By organising this event UNITEE wanted to shed light on the ongoing struggle for equal opportunity and engage its members in an open discussion.

Quotas and Sanctions

Viviane TEITELBAUM provided opening remarks to the panel debate, describing the role and work of the European Women's Lobby (EWL) in tackling gender equality at work. For full democratic participation in society, decision-making needs to be inclusive. She stressed that more needs to be done to make the economic case for gender equality, for example for women's representation on boards, an issue currently being debated in the Council. According to the EWL, self-regulation has not been effective. There has been painfully slow progress, if any, through volunteer targets for gender equality in the workplace. The EWL is lobbying for quotas to act as corrective measures to be implemented alongside the promotion of female leadership. Ms TEITELBAUM also called for legislation to be put in place with a sanctions procedure as a means of making real progress towards gender equality at work.

Arnd BECKER picked up the issue and stated that CESI is in favour of binding quotas for women's representations on boards, an issue which has been blocked in the Council for some time.

He noted some positive developments on the EU level which has seen discussions being fostered at some national levels. For example, Germany has already adopted these quotas.



Philippe KERAUDREN highlighted the role of large member states in the EU to provide leadership on concrete policies. With Germany constantly in the spotlight in Europe, maybe there should be more focus on promoting policy change in these countries.

Viviane TEITELBAUM pointed to the fact that there are lessons to be learned from many countries. The Nordic model of work-life balance and gender equality sees fathers taking a much more active role in parenting, meaning women have the same opportunities as men in the workplace.

Women on Board and Working Culture

With work experience in multinationals, **Kerstin BORN-SIRKEL** noted that there is still too big of an under-representation of women on boards of global companies, although there are vast differences from country-to-country on women's representation on boards. With the EU average at 26%, in Malta women's representation on boards is extremely low at 2%. Women are working, but leadership positions are taken by men who are willing to stay longer at work. This, she stressed, is linked to a working culture where men are able to stay and work longer after hours. Promoting change in this culture is a challenge to Ms BORN-SIRKEL.

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Women are working, but leadership positions are taken by men who are willing to stay longer at work, it's the working culture.

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Kerstin BORN-SIRKEL



Playing devil's advocate, she pondered whether this was a challenge best tackled from the inside, with women perhaps adapting to this culture to make progress from the top.

Philippe KERAUDREN went on to point how that cultural issues in gender equality could be addressed through education. With girls generally outperforming boys at school, there is still a gap in the transition to employment. This gap extends on an even greater scale to pensions. In this context, quotas would prove useful in fostering gender equality when put in place over a transitional period. He concluded by calling for a need to rethink equality as we see it today.

The Concept of Diversity

Kerstin BORN-SIRKEL reaffirmed the point made that this should not have to be a topic for debate in this day and age. She also underlined that the debate is broader than just gender equality and that diversity in the workplace as a whole is important. She confirmed the remarks made by Adem KUMCU and additionally highlighted the participation in work of disabled people.

Viviane TEITELBAUM added that, despite it being important to include minorities, women should not be considered as such as they represent 52 percent of the population and should therefore not be marginalised in this way.

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Women are 52% of the world's population, they ought to be represented in decision-making.

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Viviane TEITELBAUM



The Public Sector Case

Philippe KERAUDREN started positively by stating that progress is being made in gender equality at work. However, a plateau is being reached from which it might be difficult to move. Relying on good will alone, it will take 70 years to achieve gender equality. According to Mr KERAUDREN, the 2008 economic crisis triggered some improvements in equal opportunities, in particular related to pay. As a trade union representative, he then went on to outline the harsh realities facing unions, who are not the best examples being mostly male-dominated bodies. Social dialogue is currently not an effective enough tool to address gender equality, with the EU institutions not respecting social dialogue internally.

Understanding the public sector nature of CESI, **Kerstin BORN-SIRKEL** concluded her intervention calling on the public sector to lead by example. The new European Commission's team nearly failed in this respect, with only 9 female commissioners. This is neither an improvement nor a step back from the previous Commission, despite good intentions to achieve a more balanced team.

Arnd BECKERS described the work of CESI's Women's Rights and Gender Equality committee over the past year, with a focus on the gender pay gap, women in leading positions and structural barriers to gender equality in the workplace. These are topics which are repeatedly discussed and areas where more progress needs to be made. Gender typing also remains a cultural problem which should be addressed at a young age. Working for a trade union whose membership lies heavily in the public sector, he

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We need to rethink democracy,
but we need to rethink
equality too.

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Philippe KERAUDREN



made the case that women fare better in the public sector, not only in terms of representation but also in terms of working conditions. Austerity measures across the EU have fallen particularly hard on public services, which means that the impact on women has been harder. As a social partner, he thought it important to point out that not all social partners are living up to the standards they preach, with gender equality within the organisations not always guaranteed.

Klaus HEEGER, Secretary General of CESI, took the floor to express his ambition for trade unions to show some leadership for change. However, this change needs to start at home, within unions themselves. Trade unions must be younger and more democratic, breaking some of the cultural barriers to leadership within unions.

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When dealing with gender equality, we have to talk about structural equality, stereotypes & education.

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Arnd BECKERS



Choices and Childcare

Fiona O'MALLEY drew on her experience of the Irish workforce. Gender equality needs to start at the stage of getting the job and must continue throughout participation in the job. One of the greatest obstacles for women in the workplace is affordable childcare. With childcare costing the equivalent of a mortgage payment in Ireland, it is becoming increasingly unaffordable. In Ireland the gender pay gap did decrease but trends are turning, with the gap currently on the rise. With experience in the banking sector, she saw women more in administrative roles, with men more in financial roles. She attributed this trend to the ability of men to work longer hours.

Women leaving on time, adhering to their working hours, are too often perceived as lacking commitment to the job. The work-life balance offered by the private sector, through part-time work or flexible working hours on returning from maternity leave are not always available. There is a need to work on norms and change mind-sets.

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Culture is essential to gender equality. Mind-sets are to be changed at a young age. We need to work on our normed mind-sets.

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Fiona O'MALLEY



Ms O'MALLEY drew on comments from the audience which referred to a recent article on women freezing eggs to be able to have a career and stressed that women must not be judged for their decisions in life either with respect to their family or to their career. **Marina PATRIARKA** from Eurofound concluded the debate by pointing to an upcoming report from the agency on the gender employment gap. This report seeks to highlight the economic costs this gap has had on society.

Conclusions

Klaus HEEGER, Secretary General of CESI, provided concluding remarks to the debate, pointing to the fact that even though insights into gender equality may not be innovative, they are still relevant and there is still broad agreement that progress needs to be made. Sanctions with binding laws may be the only means of ensuring that real steps forward are made. He views the EU's economic governance cycle as an example of where there is potential for promoting progress, seeing the European Semester's country specific recommendations as a potential tool. However, while in 2013 Austria

was issued recommendations on the gender pay gap, in the 2014 recommendations there was no mention of the gender pay gap, despite the fact that the issue has not been effectively tackled. The EU has not done well in leading by example and change is needed in this respect.

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Women shouldn't think that they cannot go beyond the glass ceiling.

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Klaus HEEGER



For more information

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