

SLOVENIA

Presentation of the Combined Fifth and Sixth Periodic Report to the 62nd session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Opening statement by Ms Martina VUK

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Geneva, 30 October 2015

Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished members of the Committee,
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour and a privilege for me today to present the Combined Fifth and the Sixth Periodic Report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in the Republic of Slovenia, as well as to provide an update on recent developments. On behalf of my delegation, I look forward to engaging with you in what I expect to be an open and constructive dialogue.

Slovenia attaches a great importance to the reporting process and highly values the considerable efforts of the CEDAW Committee in promoting gender equality and protecting human rights of girls and women. We take our obligations under the Convention very seriously and we strongly believe that the world has become a better place for girls and women in many aspects since the adoption of this powerful mechanism for monitoring the progress of gender equality, which is a theme that is still a long-lasting challenge for all signatory countries.

Madame Chair,

Allow me now to introduce the members of my delegation:

- *Martina Vuk*, State Secretary, Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Head of Delegation;
- *Ružica Boškić*, M.Sc., Director General, Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities;
- *Maruša Gortnar*, M.Sc., Head of Equal Opportunities Sector; Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities;
- *Tanja Salecl*, M.Sc., State Secretary, Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Equal Opportunities Sector;
- *Jana Lovšin*, Secretary, Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities;
- *Jasna Jeram*, Undersecretary, Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Equal Opportunities Sector.
- *Anton Tone Klančnik*, Senior Criminal Police Inspector Specialist; Ministry of the Interior, Police; and
- *Mija Javornik*, Analyst, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport.

Slovenia submitted its 5th and 6th report to this Committee in May of 2014, and replied to a list of additional questions by July 2015.

The Report was coordinated by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, as well as relevant ministries. The preparation process of our report and the preparation of replies to a list of additional questions included not only all relevant ministers and governmental offices, but also other state administrative bodies and NGO's which were invited to submit their opinions and proposals to supplement the text. In January 2014, the report was adopted by the Government and submitted for consideration to the National Assembly. The Combined 5th and 6th report is available on the websites of the Ministry for Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Madame Chair,

I would like to emphasize that the Government of Slovenia remains committed to achieving the highest standards in the field of gender equality and non- discrimination. The Beijing Platform for Action and its follow-up process has been our major legal policy framework for designing, implementing and assessing the effects of measures and strategies to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. In addition, it was instrumental in the formulation and enforcement of policies to promote gender equality. Since the submission of our national report under review by this Committee, there have been several new developments and I would like to take this opportunity to outline some of these key initiatives the government is taking with regard to the institutional and legal framework of gender equality policies.

I would like to start with the critical area of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women. Creating and strengthening national structures that would fulfil the function of integrating the principle of gender equality is one of the priority areas of the Beijing Platform for Action. As you are aware there have been some changes concerning institutional mechanisms in Slovenia. I would like to clarify them in order to affirm that our commitment to gender equality is as strong as ever.

In 2012, tasks performed by the Governmental Office for Equal Opportunities were transferred to the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs which became responsible also for gender equality policy. At that time, there was no independent unit responsible for this policy and the

issue of women's rights and gender equality became less visible. As a consequence, there was a great pressure/demand from academic and civil society organisations to make it more powerful again. One of their greatest fears was that the small unit within the ministry would diminish the role of the national machinery in Republic of Slovenia. With the new Government, the new Minister of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities consulted the NGO's and other gender equality experts about the strengthening of the national machinery for gender equality. Due to the budgetary restrictions, there was no political will to (re)establish an independent gender equality body, however there was a possibility to strengthen the national machinery within the ministry.

The first step was taken in 2013 with the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Department within the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. As a result, the equality of women and men became an independent area again, positioned directly under the minister. The second step was the establishment of an expert advisory body to the minister in December of 2014, focusing on the matters regarding the equality of women and men - the Expert Council for Gender Equality. It is composed of 15 members working in the field of gender equality and women's rights within NGO's, academic institutions and government administration. It's main goal is to promote and monitor gender equality policy, propose initiatives for improvement of the status of women in Slovenia, as well as discuss how to better implement the principle of non-discrimination. The minister responsible for gender equality is also the chair the Council. Moreover, having a minister as the highest authority in the area of gender equality also has its advantages. For instance, the minister takes care that the Government has a gender equality perspective integrated in its work and can inform and consult with the members of the Cabinet about the most recent developments.

The Act on Equal Opportunities between Women and Men determines that each ministry has to appoint a coordinator of equal opportunities for women and men. In 2015, the ministers reconfirmed or newly appointed coordinators for equal opportunities between men and women in all the ministries. Furthermore, the municipalities were encouraged to appoint more local coordinators. Useful guidelines and working plans for coordinators in the ministries were prepared and action plans for gender equality at local level were developed by the local administrations. With regard to the financial resources, there has been a substantial increase in the budget allocated to the Equal Opportunities Department for its own activities and co-financing the projects of NGO's.

I hope that I managed to assure you that there is a strong political will and commitment to build gender equality, as well as to keep the high standards regarding gender issues. However, a certain discrepancy between legislation and its enforcement and also the lack of capacities are still evident. Bearing in mind that improving the status of women is an ongoing process requiring commitment by all stakeholders, the Slovenian Government will continue with the process of strengthening the national machinery for the advancement of women, working closely with the civil society.

Over the past years, considerable efforts have been made in monitoring the implementation of laws, programmes and policies. I am going to refer to some of them now. The first key strategic document for achieving gender equality in Slovenia, the Resolution on the National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, has been evaluated and the new national programme for equality between women and men has been adopted by the Parliament just three days ago. The new national programme for the period 2015-2020 defines the main goals for achieving gender equality and assigns the measures that have to be adopted by the ministries. It deals with the following issues: economic independence, work-life balance, gender stereotypes, social inclusion, decision-making, violence against women, women's health and gender equality in foreign policy and international cooperation. It obliges the ministries to continue mainstreaming gender perspective in all key legislative and policy documents, such as resolutions, working programmes etc. Each ministry has to prepare concrete action plans that will be developed and carried out over a given period of time. The new national programme was prepared in close collaboration with all ministries, relevant NGO's, social partners and prominent gender experts. The inputs, comments and observations from these actors and the evaluation of the first national programme provided an important framework for the new strategy. The national programme has been made available to the public and posted on the official website of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

There is another issue regarding the institutional machinery - the Advocate of the Principle of Equality. With the abolition of the Office for Equal Opportunities in 2012, also the Advocate, acting as equality body, was transferred to the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. Since then, the Ministry continued with its efforts to find a more appropriate arrangement for organisational structure and operational capacity of the Advocate. Currently the draft of the new Protection Against Discrimination Act which will replace the Implementation of

the Principle of Equal Treatment Act is prepared. The draft law establishes a new, more independent equality body as required by the EU directives. The new law will define the mandate and competences of the Advocate of the Principle of Equality, dealing with all discrimination grounds established by the law. One of the biggest challenges remains how to efficiently implement the law, since there are almost no victims willing to pursue complaints. This is of considerable importance to the practical value of the principle of equality.

Madame Chair,

Let me continue with a brief description of some other positive developments and remaining challenges that our government is trying to meet. The Slovenian Government is committed to building a fair and equal society by breaking down the barriers that prevent women to reach their full potential. I would like to draw your attention to the critical area of concern of political participation and decision-making. Since Slovenia was last examined by the CEDAW Committee in 2008, we have made considerable progress in this area.

The introduction of obligatory quotas for national, local and European elections resulted in the improved situation, where the share of elected women parliamentarians, which never exceeded 13% before, significantly increased. Women now represent 35,6 % of the Parliament, parity is reached in the Slovenian Cabinet: half of the ministers are women. This is a moment of pride for all of us striving for gender equality. In 2013, Slovenia got its first female prime minister. The situation has improved at the local level as well. In the 2014 local elections, 31,8 % of women counsellors were elected. However, the participation of women in the National Council and among mayors remains consistently low. After the last elections to the National Council in 2012, only 7,5 % of those elected were women, with about the same percentage of women mayors elected in local elections in 2014.

Pursuant to the relevant recommendations made by the CEDAW Committee, further efforts have been made to increase the participation of women and promote equality in both public and political life. At the legislative level, the Government supported the initiative to amend the Election to the National Assembly Act which has been enacted in the beginning of this year. The initiative stipulates a quota of at least 40 % representation for each sex. With the aim of raising awareness and supporting a greater involvement of women in politics, several projects have

been carried out, the most prominent being the project "Towards Equalising Power relations Between Women and Men", implemented by our ministry.

Based on a positive experience with improvements in the area of political decision-making, the next challenge is greater power of women in economy. In Slovenia, the number of women in managerial and leadership positions in companies has constantly been low. In 2014, the largest listed Slovenian companies were composed of only 5% of Board Presidents, while women made up 21% of Executive and 22% of Non-Executive Directors.

With the aim to improve the representation of women at the highest position of management and leadership in economy and business, from 2013 to 2015 the ministry implemented the project "Include.all". The main objectives of this project are to improve knowledge on the situation of female and male managers and to study and find ways to overcome the barriers for gender balanced economic decision-making with the aim to encourage businesses to strengthen the presence of women at all levels of decision making. Furthermore, based on a strong support from the parliament, business companies and general public, the Slovenian Government is currently preparing the legal basis for the introduction of special measures (gender quotas) to increase the participation of women on the corporate boards. The draft proposal shall be prepared by the end of this year.

Madam Chair,

Slovenia has taken major steps since our 4th report to CEDAW to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls which is one of the top priorities for the government. Significant steps have been taken both at the legislative as well as at the implementation level. I would like to emphasize the fact that Slovenia has managed to ensure the effective implementation and enforcement of the Family Violence Prevention Act through a comprehensive multi-sectoral approach. Multi-institutional teams and working groups composed of members from different ministries, police, civil society, women's organisations etc. have been set up in order to foster a strong spirit of co-operation of both women and men that has led to many legislative and institutional breakthroughs in this field. Progress can be seen in the resulting more effective coordination among the authorities and services involved as well as the increased efficiency of measures taken to protect the victims of family violence and violence against women. In addition, the staff of institutions responsible for assisting victims of family violence gained better

knowledge and sensitivity to the issues at hand. One of the projects that made a large contribution to raising awareness and building capacity about the issue of domestic violence and violence against women of both the general public and professionals, is the project "Vesna", which was carried out in 2014 and 2015 by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities together with the Police and in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and the Supreme State Prosecutor's Office.

The first national survey on violence in private life and partnership has shown that the institutions are more capable of detecting, identifying and dealing with cases of domestic violence. As a result, victims more frequently seek assistance from the state. Currently, the Government is reviewing the Family Violence Prevention Act and preparing a new Resolution on the National Programme for Prevention of Family Violence and Violence against Women. With the purpose to monitor the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, ratified by Slovenia in February 2015, an intersectoral coordination group is being established.

What is also worth mentioning is the increased efforts put into combating trafficking in human beings and providing support to the victims involved. In July 2015, the National Assembly adopted an Act to amend the Criminal Code introducing two new offences, stalking, and forced marriages and civil partnerships. The Article of the Criminal Code that defines criminal offence committed under the threat has been changed. When reporting threat, the victims will no longer have to file a private lawsuit, but such offences will be prosecuted *ex officio*. The proposed changes will hopefully help women to decide more often to report such violence to the authorities.

Madame Chair,

Allow me now to draw your attention to the issue which is of outmost importance for the well-being of women – economic independence. The Government of Slovenia realises that empowering women economically is one of the key strategies to achieving gender equality. In 2008, like many other countries, Slovenia was undergoing a severe financial and economic crisis. As a result, unemployment of women has increased and their participation in the labour market has decreased. However, the women's labour participation rate is still relatively high, at 63%. This is still below the male participation rate of 71,2%. The pay gap has increased slightly over the last year (from 2,5 % to 3,2 %), but it is still the second lowest in the EU. Like many

other countries affected by the financial crisis, Slovenia has had to make some difficult decisions about how to stabilise public finances. Some measures that have been taken have had a direct impact on the status of women. These measures have been later carefully recomposed by the new government not to affect the most vulnerable groups of women. Slovenian Government is fully committed to ensuring that women are not disproportionately affected by the economic climate and can achieve their potential on the labour market.

The Slovenian Government continues to focus on encouraging shared care-giving responsibilities through various efforts. One of these is the on-going national campaign to promote a greater involvement of fathers in their children's lives. Through such efforts, we have seen real progress in the attitudes of men towards parenting. After we introduced the paternal leave in 2003, more and more fathers started taking the leave (now about 2/3 of all fathers are taking paternal leave). However, the number of fathers sharing parental leave or taking sick leave to care for their children remains low. The unfair division of household tasks between women and men still exists and women still perform the largest part of "domestic" work within the family and in private life, even if they work full time.

The Government is aware that the availability of affordable and reliable high quality childcare, services for parents of elementary school children, qualitative and affordable facilities and services for elderly, paid maternity, paternal and parental leaves are all important factors having a significant impact on the position of women in the labour market and their position in society in general. Apart from the important achievements mentioned above, Slovenia still faces many difficulties and challenges in the implementation of CEDAW. One of the biggest challenges is how to fight gender stereotypes. Gender-based prejudices and stereotypes are one of the most persistent causes of inequality, influencing the girls and women's choices for education, training and employment, the sharing of domestic and family responsibilities, participation in decision-making positions and participation and representation in political life and in the economy. In Slovenia, women are more educated than men but the persistent gender stereotypes prevent them from achieving their full competitive potential. The elimination of gender stereotypes in education, training and culture, is one of the priorities of the new national programme 2015-2020. The focus will be on the on the development of policies and programs for eliminating gender stereotypes and promoting gender equality in educational curriculums from an early age.

Madame Chair,

Having outlined the progress made it has to be admitted that efforts still have to be made to further the implementation of the Convention. I can assure you my Government is fully motivated to continue with this important work. Bearing in mind that the striving for gender equality requires constant attention and effort, the Slovenian Government is fully aware of the challenges we face and is committed to tackling and overcoming them.

On behalf of the entire delegation, I now welcome the opportunity to further discuss these issues with you and to provide answers to any questions you have concerning the measures taken by our government to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, as set out in our 5th and 6th Report.

Thank you for your attention.