

Introductory Statement by

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Madame Chairperson,
Honourable Members of the Committee

This is a great honour and pleasure to the delegation of the Republic of Estonia to participate in the 65th Session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. This is the third time that our delegation has the possibility to appear before the Committee. Estonian Government finds it very important that we can continue the constructive dialogue with the Committee that began in 2002 when our delegation was in New York with our first report. We do our best to assist the Committee's consideration of our periodic report to the greatest extent possible. I would also like to apologize for the delay of the Estonian report.

Let me now introduce the rest of the Estonian delegation. Mr Andre Pung, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of Estonia to the United Nations and Other International Organisations in Geneva; Ms Liisa-Ly Pakosta, Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner; Ms Liina Kanter, Head of Equality Policies Department, Ministry of Social Affairs; Ms Hede Sinisaar, Head of Analysis and Statistics Department, Ministry of Social Affairs; Ms Kristiina Luht, Adviser of Equality Policies Department, Ministry of Social Affairs; Ms Agnes Einman, Head of Gender Equality Policy of Equality Policies Department, Ministry of Social Affairs and Ms Triinu Kallas, 1st Secretary, Permanent Mission of Estonia to the United Nations and Other International Organisations in Geneva.

Hereby I would like to introduce our report to the Committee and make a short overview of recent developments in Estonia as concerns the questions of gender equality and measures taken to eliminate gender discrimination in our society.

The Gender Equality Act was entered into force 1st of May 2004. In 2009 the amendments were included to improve the implementation of the act and in October 2013, the Government of the Republic established the Gender Equality Council, an advisory body to the Government set forth in the GEA. Its main responsibilities are advising the Government in matters related to strategies for the promotion of gender equality, approving general objectives of gender equality policy and presenting opinions to the Government concerning the compliance of national programmes with the obligation of gender mainstreaming.

On 1st of January 2009 the Equal Treatment Act (ETA), entered into force with a purpose to ensure the protection of persons against discrimination on grounds of nationality (ethnic origin), race, colour, religion or other beliefs, age, disability and sexual orientation. In the years 2005-2008 the mandate of the Commissioner was to monitor compliance with the GEA. In 2009 the mandate was expanded to also monitor compliance with the ETA, the institution of the Gender Equality Commissioner was re-organised into the institution of the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner, and the regulation concerning the tasks and powers of the Commissioner was moved from the GEA to the ETA.

Gender Mainstreaming Working Group composed of representatives from Estonian government ministries and co-ordinated by the Ministry of Social Affairs was re-formed in 2011 with the aim of providing training for a range of government employees on gender mainstreaming and drafting gender mainstreaming strategies for various policy areas.

Although there is no one single action plan for promoting gender equality, the Welfare Development Plan is the main action plan for gender equality and foresees a variety of activities to tackle gender inequality. "Welfare Development Plan 2016-2016" includes plans for measures to raise public awareness of the need and positive impact of sharing both care burden and unpaid housework more equally between women and men, support observing gender equality principles in media, actions that focus on areas for a more balanced participation of women and men on all levels of decision-making in politics, actions to target

segregation and gender stereotypes and a list of measures planned to be taken to decrease gender pay gap.

Gender statistics have an essential role in the elimination of stereotypes, in the formulation of policies, in raising awareness, inspiring measures for change and providing unbiased basis for policies and measures.

In 2013, the Statistics Estonia started to implement a project “Increased availability of gender pay gap statistics”. In the course of the project, already existing data sources (surveys, registries) were mapped to find the best data sources for monitoring the gender pay gap. One key objective and a result of the project was the creation of a combined database that contains not only data on wages, but also other significant variables necessary for a complex analysis of the gender pay gap. The variables, in turn, help to understand the essence of this phenomenon and provide an explanation for its causes. The Statistics Estonia also drafted “Strategy of Pay Gap Statistics 2016-2023“ and will continue to move towards using various registries to produce statistics. Although registries today lack the sufficient amount of background variables there are several that are under development that might in the future allow publishing pay gap statistics along with various background variables.

In order to have a better overview of attitudes and opinions women and men carry concerning the situation and position of men and women in a society, the fourth “Gender Equality Monitoring” is currently being prepared and the results will be available at the end of this year. The analysis of the results of the survey will be made available to the public at the homepage of the ministry as have all the previous ones.

Madame Chairperson, honourable members of the Committee,

I would now like to continue with introducing our national institutions and organizations dealing with gender equality issues.

From 1st of January 2004 the previous Gender Equality Bureau has been operating under the authority of the Deputy Secretary General of Social Affairs first as the Gender Equality Department and from 2015 as the Equal Policies Department. The Department mainly deals with all matters concerning gender equality, including drafting relevant legislation and policies, raising awareness, coordinating the implementation of gender mainstreaming,

cooperating with the academic community in producing research on gender issues. Also the topics of domestic violence and prevention of trafficking in women are dealt with in the Gender Equality Department. The department also works with other topics of equal treatment.

From 2010, the co-ordination of family policies in Estonia operates as a separate department under deputy secretary general of the Ministry of Social Affairs.

The work of the gender equality unit is supported by the policy information and analysis departments of the Ministry of Social Affairs. The Social Policy Information and Analysis Department is preparing different indicators for measuring the situation of gender equality in Estonia, coordinating the research activities and analysis of the disaggregated data.

Pursuant to Gender Equality Act and the Equal Treatment Act the Commissioner monitors compliance with the requirements of the GEA and ETA, accepts applications from persons and provides expert opinions, analyses the effect of laws on the status of men and women in society, makes proposals to Government and to government agencies, as well as to local governments and their agencies, regarding alterations and amendments to legislations, advises and informs Government, government agencies and local government agencies on issues related to implementation of the acts, and shall take measures to promote gender equality and equal treatment.

Several research-related institutions and NGO-s, for example Estonian Women's Studies and Resource Centre (ENUT), are working on gender equality issues.

Madame Chairperson, honourable members of the Committee,

I would like to continue by giving some information about the progress made in the field of fight against trafficking in human beings.

Estonia has adopted a comprehensive Development Strategy for Reducing Violence (2015–2020), which lays out concrete activities on how to reduce and prevent violence in its various forms, including domestic violence, sexual violence, violence against minors, and trafficking in human beings (including prostitution). The development plan foresees a number of actions and brings together a national network of officials and experts both from the governmental and non-governmental sector, including all civil society representatives.

The Victim Support Act was amended in 2013 and since then trafficking victims receive support via Social Insurance Board. The services are still provided by NGOs like before, but more sustainable system was created. Safe housing, counselling services, catering, necessary material assistance, translation and interpretation services are available. The services are provided until the need for the services ceases to exist.

For identifying victims, since 2009 there has been victim identification and support guideline available. It was created in cooperation with governmental and non-governmental organisations and it has been amended several times to guarantee accordance with the legislation. Next amendments will be prepared in 2016/2017.

In 2012-2015 the Ministry of Social Affairs was co-ordinating an implementation of the programme on Domestic and Gender Based Violence funded from the Norwegian Financial Mechanism. Several activities to support trafficking victims and to prevent trafficking were also financed through that programme. Development of services for trafficked women and women involved in prostitution, as well as research on the needs of trafficked and sexually exploited persons and training of prosecutors and other relevant stakeholders were conducted during the period.

Few words about prostitution. Unofficial estimations by the Police and service providing NGO are the same – there are about 700 persons in prostitution in Estonia. There is strong and experienced NGO supporting prostituted persons, providing services for around 300 persons per year, most of them women. The social and psychological rehabilitation centre for prostituted women was created in 2005, and since 2009, these services have been financed by the State budget.

Prostitution is mostly considered as a form of violence against women and mediating prostitution as trafficking-related crime. Prevention and victim support strategies are based on these assumptions. All the services are free of charge and anonymous. Support centres are located in Estonian capital and South and Northwest region. Social, legal and psychological counselling is provided as well as health services and medical check-ups. In 2015, new project started, helping women who have exited prostitution to join the labour market.

Women receive job training and relevant additional support services from the Labour Market Board, and at the same time they are being supported by the specialised NGO.

To discourage male demand for prostitution is partly dealt with the new law proposal criminalising buying of sex from trafficking victim. The Penal Code is supposed to be amended in 2017.

Madame Chairperson, let me now proceed with the issue of violence against women.

Estonia has made significant progress regarding the support for victims of violence. Starting from January 1, 2017, women's support service is stated as official service in the Victim Support Act, thus providing more sustainability and more secure financing for organisations providing such services in the future. Services continue to be free for all the women victims and their children.

The first shelter for women, who are the victims of domestic violence, was established in 2002. Today Estonia has regional coverage of women's shelters – in every County, there is a women's support centre (or two) providing temporary safe accommodation and counselling services for victims of violence against women.

In 2015, services were launched for the victims of sexual violence. Project implemented by the Estonian Sexual Health Association created networking and readiness in hospitals to provide specialised support for rape victims. Since November this year, coordination of services is provided by the Social Insurance Board, which means the service is now part of the official victim support system.

Different studies have been carried out in previous years. Estonian Institute for Open Society prepared an analysis of the cost of gender based violence which can be used as a basis for more economically sustainable policy decisions in the future. A survey conducted by the Estonian Women Shelter Union on the content of the services showed a high satisfaction with the availability and quality of the services all over the country. Also a survey and a study were conducted to improve knowledge and data about the nature and spread of sexual violence in Estonia. In addition, public opinion on gender-based violence was studied and it appeared that almost nobody today considers domestic violence a private matter. We are very satisfied about that change of attitudes.

Regarding prevention, Norway Grants domestic and gender-based violence programme focused on public awareness raising activities. Also the project “Bringing up a violence free generation”, financed from the EU Progress Programme and implemented in co-operation of several Ministries, Boards and NGOs was implemented in 2014-2015. Among the activities was an awareness raising campaign “Open your eyes” targeting young people, training of the trainers and specific empowerment trainings targeting boys and girls. Rather innovative in the project was the cooperation with annual biggest dance event “The School Dance” that created good opportunity to approach young people all over Estonia and talk about gender roles and gender based violence.

Network training project is being implemented since 2013 to improve cooperation between different institutions dealing with victims of violence. It is addressing members of cooperation network, including victim support workers, women`s shelters` workers, police officers, prosecutors, social workers, etc., in order to improve the efficiency of solving cases of violence in the legal system as well as the accessibility and quality of the help offered to victims in all Estonian counties. There have been many different extra training courses for police officers.

Estonia also started comprehensive sensitivity training in Internal Defence Academy that contain practical training of effective communication skills for the police, prosecutors, judges and victim support workers.

Estonia will ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence in 2017.

Madame Chairperson,

Next issue I would like to cover is the participation of women in decision making. Achieving a gender balance there remains a challenging domain for the improvement of the situation of women in Estonia.

It is slightly more difficult for women to get elected to publicly elected bodies and even though women are present in political parties, not enough of them stand as candidates at elections. One of the main impediments for women to get elected is their position in candidate

lists. A positive trend is the growing number of female candidates in both parliamentary and local government council elections.

This October, Estonia elected its first female President of the Republic. In the present government there are two women ministers Minister of Education and Research and Minister of Entrepreneurship.

The low representation of women in politics has been criticized by civil society organisations and researchers, and attempts have been made to influence the parties to appoint more women to leading positions and elective posts.

A positive development in the parliament is the resumption of the cross-party Women's Committee in 2011 which is formed by all the female members of the parliament regardless of their political views.

Under the gender equality sub-objective of the "Welfare Development Plan 2016-2023" and its action plan, one of the focus areas is a balanced participation of women and men on all levels of decision-making in politics. According to the action plan, awareness-raising measures will be implemented in the coming years to raise an awareness of entrepreneurs about a need and possibilities to improve gender balance in a management level of organisations. Additionally, awareness-raising activities will be planned to support possible use of a zipper-method in electoral lists. Since zipper-method or quotas still has a rather negative connotation to it among both the general public and politicians, we feel that before taking more sufficient action, there is a need for awareness rising in this regard.

Madame Chairperson, Honourable members of the Committee,

Next issue I would like to cover is the area of education and stereotypes. Educational and research institutions and institutions engaged in the provision of education and training must ensure equal treatment of men and women in vocational guidance, acquisition of education, professional and vocational development and re-training. The curricula, study material used and research conducted have to facilitate the elimination of unequal treatment of men and women and promote equality.

A survey carried out in 2011 showed that teachers' views concerning male and female pupils and men and women are, similarly to the general society, rather stereotypical. At the same time, a vast majority of the respondents believed that the principle of equal treatment is followed in the process of evaluation of pupils and that exactly the same norms are applied to the behaviour of boys and girls.

In the academic year 2011/12 schools started to implement the new National Curriculum of Basic School and the new National Curriculum of Upper-secondary School. These governmental regulations establish standards for activity for these two school levels. Gender equality is one of the core social values stipulated in the curricula that schools should consider in the school management. This principle should be taken into account also when compiling study materials. Also, in designing the social and mental environment of the school, the school life should be arranged based on the principle of gender equality.

Two larger-scale projects were financed through an open call from the Norway Grants 2009-2014 gender equality programme and implemented in 2014-2015. The objective of the Estonian Women's Associations Roundtable's project was to promote gender equality through integrating the gender perspective into teacher education and training, raising gender awareness of teacher educators and practicing teachers and developing a comprehensive system of support to achieve the objective. The objective of the Praxis Centre for Policy Studies' project was to promote gender equality in Estonia through mainstreaming the gender equality into higher education. The main outcome of the project was a gender equality study programme to be integrated into the programmes of social sciences and teacher education. Several smaller projects promoting gender equality in education were additionally financed through the programme. The feedback from participants has been positive and all the learning tools developed under the project have been made available on Praxis website. In addition, a website called gender and education was created by Estonian Women's Association. The website gathers various research papers and materials to help teachers implement gender aspects to their teachings. The website is also informative to a more general public, providing information and most recent information on gender and education.

Successful promotion of gender equality in school however does not only include teacher training, but a better understanding of gender equality and re-enforcement of gender stereotypes and their harmful nature among head of schools. Thus, from financed from

Gambling Tax Council, Praxis is currently conducting trainings for heads of schools to bring a better gender perspective into school managements.

Madame Chairperson, Honourable members of the Committee,

Women are traditionally less active in the labour market than men but their participation in the labour force has grown since the previous report and is relatively high. Estonian labour market features a high degree of gender segregation. Men and women are engaged in different areas of activities, which indicate that traditional patterns of jobs for men and women continue to prevail. While women were mostly employed in education, wholesale and retail trade and manufacturing, men were mainly employed in manufacturing, construction and transportation and storage.

Although men and women can choose their profession freely, we can see that gender stereotypes still strongly effect career choices. To tackle these stereotypes, wide scale awareness campaigns have been carried out. During one of the campaigns, 6 videos tackling gender stereotypes were produced and these videos are still used today in television, cinemas and also by theatres and NGO-s to raise awareness.

To tackle the same issue, every other year, The Ministry of Social Affairs has been carrying out Boys and Girls Career Days, during which girls and boys are introduced jobs and professions traditionally associated and occupied by the other sex. We hope to see a rise in participation among pupils as the awareness of career days grows both between teachers and students.

This year, during Equal Pay Day, the Ministry of Social Affairs carried out a literature contest, where high school aged youth could submit essays, poems and short stories on the topic of gender equality and equal pay. The contest was very successful and we are planning to continue with it in the upcoming years.

Gender pay gap remains a priority issues in Estonia, as our gender pay gap is still the highest in the European Union and one of the highest in the world. In order to give additional impetus to the reduction of gender pay gap, an amendment of the Gender Equality Act is under preparation aiming at providing the Labour Inspectorate with a right to exercise state

supervision over implementation of the requirement of equal pay for women and men for the same work and work of equal value. Also, relevant guidelines will be prepared and trainings organised and several paragraphs of the GEA will be clarified. The meaning of same work and work of equal value will be more thoroughly explained and necessary guidelines will be prepared for employers and the Labour Inspectorate.

The need and options for supporting a notable change in sharing care responsibilities between women and men have been addressed in a Green Paper on family benefits, services and parental leave which was discussed by the previous Government in 2015. Policy recommendations of the paper suggested giving more choice to parents with regard to length and compensation of the parental leave, herewith supporting flexible return to work. Another recommendation suggested introducing use-it-or-lose-it principle to the parental leave system, by allocating part of the leave only for a mother and part of it only for a father. Further analysis and policy proposals based on the Green Paper are expected to be submitted to the present Government in 2016.

Ministry of Social Affairs has been preparing a policy analysis on parental leaves and benefits during 2016. In November 2016 the policy recommendations will be discussed by the Government. The document gives thorough overview of the statistics connected to all parental leaves and benefits (all together 7 different leaves and benefits), analyses current challenges and bottlenecks, and provides alternative policy recommendations with the assessment of impact. There are 3 main objectives pointed out in the policy analysis: to encourage a more balanced distribution of parental leaves and benefits between mother and father, to create more flexible opportunities for parents to use parental leaves and receive benefits and to ensure legal clarity and purposefulness of measures of the system of parental leaves and benefits. The main recommendations include a so-called father`s quota and possibilities for both parents to work part-time and be on leave part-time.

Thank you for your kind attention! We now do our best to answer all your questions as thoroughly as we can.