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PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY- UNION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN
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الجمعية البرلمانية للاتحاد من اجل المتوسط

Women's Rights Committee

Minutes of the meeting of 15 February 2024

On 15 February, the fourth meeting of the 2020-2024 four-year term of the Women's Rights Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean (PA-UfM) was held in Rabat: it was the first to be chaired by Senator Simona Petrucci following the renewal of the Italian Parliament in September 2022.

It was attended by delegations from the Parliaments of Greece, Jordan, Morocco, the European Parliament, Portugal, Spain and Turkey.

After recalling the recent informal preliminary exchange, held by videoconference on 8 February, Committee President Simona Petrucci moves on to illustrate the agenda, which she submits to the Committee for approval. The President then proceeds, as per item 2 of the agenda, to submit the *minutes* of the meeting of 13 July 2022 for their approval by the Committee.

President Petrucci then goes on to illustrate the theme of the meeting – “*Women's access to STEM education as an agent of change*”, - identified by the President herself - and proposed through the Bureau - as an object of in-depth study by the Committee for the following months. She referred to the framework outlined in the *Concept Note* - previously distributed to the members of the Committee - and proposed a number of areas for further study.

The President then reports on the meetings she held in the days leading up to the meeting in Barcelona with Nasser KAMEL, Secretary General of the UfM, and in Rome, with Deputy Secretary General Grammenos MASTROJENI, in order to explore the possibility to foster further synergies between the governmental and the parliamentary dimension and to learn about the projects that already exist within the UfM on access for women and girls to STEM education.

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The President then moves on to introduce Ambassador MASTROJENI's remote speech. In his opening speech, the Ambassador emphasizes the importance of gender equality and the involvement of women's potential in responding to a major geopolitical challenge such as the one facing the Mediterranean area, characterized by fragility, asymmetry and insufficient integration. In particular, in responding to climate challenges, he believes that it is crucial to enhance the role of women by adopting integrated land management as a model. Finally, he welcomes the work undertaken by President Petrucci to create greater synergies between the UfM's governmental dimension and its parliamentary dimension.

President Petrucci thanks Ambassador Mastrojeni and gives the floor to the members of the Committee. Josianne CUTAJAR (EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, EP) speaks first. She recalls the importance of the role of women in the fight against climate change, a phenomenon that strongly affects the entire Mediterranean area (as she knows very well, being Maltese). She stresses how necessary it is to encourage girls to pursue careers in the digital and innovation fields and refers to the experience of the European Parliament, which recently approved the first regulatory *framework* on artificial intelligence, where the role of women is also referenced. She points out that, in the European Parliament, there is one representative per Committee in charge of gender *mainstreaming*, just as there is a week dedicated to *gender mainstreaming*. She also illustrates her personal commitment on the topic: in the Socialist Group, she was *rapporteur* on the topic *Gender dimension in cohesion policy*: in addressing the topic, the importance of using European funds to overcome inequalities and better integrate women in the entrepreneurial and digital sector emerged clearly. She also recalls her commitment to ensure that, in the context of the 2030 Agenda goals, there is a special focus on digital skills for women and on continuing the work to combat gender stereotypes in the STEM and digital fields, highlighting successful women in these fields. Finally, she recalls the European Action Plan 2021-2027 for digital education and STEM attractiveness and the 2021 EP Resolution on promoting gender equality in STEM careers.

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Next, Lúcia ARAÚJO DA SILVA (PORTUGAL) thanks the presidency for focusing the Committee's attention on such an important issue and wishes her parliamentary colleagues well in their work, as her term of office comes to an end and new legislative elections in Portugal approach. Explaining the situation in Portugal, she assures, as a preface, that the topic of gender equality is central to the work of the Portuguese parliament.

In relation to the Commission's work theme, she reports how in Portugal more women than men graduate in the STEM field and how the challenge moves downstream in facilitating career paths in the same field. Finally, she agrees on the fundamental role that women can play in better environmental governance.

MP Belén HOYO JULIÁ (SPAIN) follows. Outlining the situation in Spain, she says that much progress has been made towards gender equality and that, nevertheless, wage disparities remain. She reiterates the need to continue resolutely combating gender violence. In terms of STEM, she cites the example of the Polytechnic University of Valencia, where more and more women enroll, although still fewer than men. She agrees that greater efforts should be made to reduce the gender gap in STEM careers and congratulates the Committee presidency for introducing this reflection into the Committee's work. She also draws attention to the need to open up not only STEM education but also digital education to women. Finally, she points out that another important issue for Spain is the entrepreneurial role of women.

MP Kyriaki MALAMA (GREECE) takes the floor next, mentioning the importance of working at the legislative level to combat gender stereotypes, to ensure women are more empowered and to combat discrimination in the job market. Greater efforts are needed to ensure that there is a greater presence of women in every scientific professional field, both at school and subsequently at the professional level.

Ms Fayzeh AHMAD HUSSEIN SHHAB (JORDAN) then speaks, emphasizing how, despite the progress made in the legislative field in terms of the protection of rights, women are still in a weaker position compared to men and have more financial

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difficulties. With regard to employment, she considers it important to work to ensure that scientific professions are no longer predominantly a prerogative of men.

Picking up on some of the points raised in the debate, including the role of women in relation to artificial intelligence and digitalization, President Petrucci reiterates the importance of training in schools, but above all the need for a better connection between universities and companies aimed at greater professionalization.

Concluding the debate, President Petrucci summarizes the Committee's working method and the areas to be explored by the Committee itself, as identified in the *Concept Note*, including:

- development of STEM skills within school curricula and subsequent study and training paths, in order to promote the employment of women in STEM professions, including through the creation of specific platforms that act as a bridge between vocational training and the STEM job market;
- combating gender prejudices and stereotypes in educational and working environments, starting with the valorization of women's contribution to STEM;
- promotion of a gender perspective in the development of technologies needed for energy transition, environmental conservation and combating climate change;
- inclusion of women in leadership positions and decision-making processes of policies related to the environment and sustainability.

The *Concept Note* is therefore submitted to the Commission for adoption.

Finally, the President, after announcing her intention to organize a future meeting in Rome, hopefully next autumn, declares the meeting closed.