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THE FORTY-FOURTH PLENARY SESSION OF THE PABSEC GENERAL ASSEMBLY
CULTURAL, EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

REPORT*

**“GENDER EQUALITY IN THE BSEC REGION:
ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES”**

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. As stipulated in the BSEC Charter, the BSEC Member States established the BSEC Organization “sharing the common vision of their regional cooperation as a part of the integration process in Europe, based on human rights and fundamental freedoms, prosperity through economic liberty, social justice, and equal security and stability” and defined their areas of cooperation “with the aim of utilizing more effectively their human, natural and other resources for attaining a sustained growth of their national economies and the social well-being of their peoples”.
2. Effective gender-mainstreaming with the goal of achieving gender equality, is important in order to make full use the human capital in the BSEC region. On the occasion of the 20th Anniversary Summit of BSEC, the Heads of State and Government stressed the importance of gender equality and the vital role of women’s participation in economic and political processes for achieving sustainable and inclusive development.
3. The Parliamentary Assembly of BSEC has discussed the issue of “Women’s Participation in the Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Life and adopted relevant Report and Recommendation (61/2002). Issues pertaining to gender equality and women’s social participation and vulnerability were also examined in several Reports and Recommendations such as: “The Legal Framework for Combating Trafficking in People” (35/1999) “Social Reintegration of Jobless People” (67/2002); “Role of Culture in the Development of the BSEC Region” (70/2003); “The Fight against Poverty in the BSEC Member-States” (74/2003); and “Social Cohesion within the BSEC Member States: Contribution to Political Stability” (103/2008). Finally, Report and Recommendation (116/2010) touched upon the issue of “Protecting Women against Violence in the BSEC Member States”.
4. With the aim to review the state of affairs regarding gender equality in the Member States, the Cultural, Educational and Social Affairs Committee decided to take up the subject of “Gender Equality in the BSEC Region: Achievements and Challenges” as the main agenda item of its 43rd Meeting. Contributions to the Report were received from the national delegations of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine. Reference material was also obtained from the official websites of UN entities, the EU and relevant international organizations such as the World Bank, ILO, the Council of Europe etc.

II. CHALLENGES FACING THE BSEC REGION IN TERMS OF GENDER EQUALITY¹

5. The BSEC region inherited some positive gender equality outcomes from the socialist legacy of investing in health and education for women and men, and the process undergone by many of the countries to join the European Union has brought renewed emphasis on remaining gender inequalities and efforts to overcome them. Some encouraging recent trends include the increased number of women on the labour market and their progress in securing better education and training.
6. The adopted legislative instruments provide legal basis for promoting gender equality in society and determine the basic directions of the state gender policy. However, the existing mechanisms and instruments on gender equality are still insufficient. Despite the fact that women obtained the de-jure status equal with men, they de-facto continue to be

¹ Having been the subject of Recommendation 116/2010 and the respective Report, the issue of violence against women is not dealt with in the present report.

discriminated as a result of the gender stereotypes that are deeply rooted in the society and also among the authorities.

7. In the labour market women are still overrepresented in lower paid sectors and under-represented in decision-making positions. This is the result of persistent horizontal segregation, where strong stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men result in concentrating women's participation in sectors traditionally viewed as "woman's work", for example those in the care professions (teaching, nursing, homecare). In addition, vertical segregation, where women and men work in the same area, but stay on different levels of the hierarchy remains a challenge in most BSEC countries.
8. The impact of parenthood on labour market participation is still very different for women and men in the BSEC region because women continue to shoulder a disproportionate part of the responsibilities involved in running a family. The difficulties in reconciling work with private life are reflected in the pay gap and other inequalities on the labour market mainly affecting women. Many women work part-time or under atypical contracts: although this permits them to remain in the labour market while managing family responsibilities, it can have a negative impact on their pay, career development, promotion prospects and pensions.
9. In most Member States, women continue to be under-represented in decision-making processes and positions, in particular at the highest levels, despite the fact that they make up nearly half the workforce and more than half of new university graduates.
10. Inequalities between women and men violate fundamental rights. They also impose a heavy toll on the economy and result in underutilization of talent. On the other hand, economic and business benefits can be gained from enhancing gender equality. The potential and the talent pool of women need to be used more extensively and more efficiently, in order to achieve the BSEC goals for sustainable and inclusive development.

III. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND NATIONAL POLICIES ON GENDER EQUALITY IN THE BSEC MEMBER STATES

11. Legislation in all BSEC Member States generally guarantees equal rights for men and women and non-discrimination in all spheres of society. The principle of equality is primarily enshrined in the Constitutions of the Member States. Reforms continue to be implemented in the Civil, Penal and Labour Codes and in other legal instruments of many Member States, and numerous strategies are being devised to promote gender equality.

Albania

12. Law 9970 of 24.07.2008 on Gender Equality in Society regulates fundamental issues of gender equality in public life, the protection and equal treatment of women and men, equal opportunities and chances to exercise their rights, as well as their participation and contribution in the development of all social fields. The aim of this law is a) to provide effective protection from gender discrimination and any other form of behavior that encourages gender discrimination; b) to define measures that provide for equal opportunities among women and men, to eliminate any form of gender based discrimination in any of its forms; c) to define responsibilities of central and local state authorities for developing and enforcing normative acts, as well as policies in support of encouraging gender equality in society.

Armenia

13. During past years many changes took place in the field of gender policy and the improvement of status of women: legislation was revised and reformed, institutions were established, mechanisms were introduced, research, training and promotion programs were

conducted, state programs for the social protection of the population are periodically reviewed, and in policy issues transition was made from women's issues to gender issues.

14. Within the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs a respective unit was set up - Department on Family, Women and Child Issues, the statutory tasks of which includes the problems of women. Upon the initiative and with the coordination of the Department, the following work was undertaken: the first three-year state program "On improvement of the status of women and enhancing their role in society" was elaborated; a gender analysis of legislation of the Republic of Armenia (some of the basic laws) was conducted, respective proposals were developed; programs for enhancing opportunities were launched in cooperation with international organizations which provided trainings for the professionals from the interested government bodies; throughout the country various discussions were organized on the matters related to this sphere; campaigns were conducted with the aim to highlight the problems of women.
15. Upon the initiative of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia and in the framework of the Joint Resolution the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Territorial Administration of the Republic of Armenia, departments for protection of children rights were established in the regional administrations (marzpetarans) and the municipality of the city of Yerevan. The responsibilities of these departments are to observe the issues related to the development and implementation at local level of the state target programs on gender policy, as well as ensuring respective arrangements.

Azerbaijan

16. One of the important steps taken in order to promote gender equality in the country was the adoption of the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Gender Equality" in 2006. The main purpose of this Law is to ensure gender equality by eliminating all forms of gender discrimination, creating equal opportunities for male and female participation in political, economic, social, cultural and other fields of social life. An important aspect of this Law is that the reasons preventing women from observing their civil rights and fundamental freedoms are identified and discussed. The Article 3 of this Law de facto implies application of the necessary measures to accelerate gender equality.
17. With the aim to ensure gender equality, the development concept "Azerbaijan 2020: Outlook for the Future" was adopted in December 2012. According to this concept the "Azerbaijan's family strategy" provides for the preparation and adoption of a national action plan on ensuring gender equality, a children's code and the national children's strategy. In February 2006 the State Committee on Family, Women and Child Issues was established on the basis of the State Committee on Women Issues. This Committee is the main executive body for implementation of the state policy in the respective areas. The State Program (2007-2010) for Implementation of Employment Strategy of the Republic of Azerbaijan approved by Presidential Decree on 15 May 2007 was aimed at increasing the employment of the vulnerable groups, particularly women and young people. The Strategy also envisages: organization of professional training for the unemployed women, research on the reasons of unemployment among women, etc.
18. The Complex State Program on Combating Daily Violence in Democratic Society and the National Plan of Action for the Protection of Human Rights in the Republic of Azerbaijan were adopted in 2007-2010 while in 2008-2015 were adopted the State Program on Poverty Reduction and Sustainable development, etc. The main issues of all these state programs were women's rights and gender issues.

19. The State Committee on Family, Women and Child Issues through realization of the comprehensive state policy in this field conducts educational activities on the existing problems, mainly in the area of gender equality, women's rights, domestic violence, depriving girls of education, early marriages, technical and vocational training, development of the population and in particular girls.

Bulgaria

20. The state policy on gender equality is implemented through national action plans for the promotion of gender equality. They aim at harmonising the legislation and the case law in Bulgaria with the *acquis communautaire*. Action plans are established and adopted annually by the Council of Ministers. Since 2005, every year reports on the implementation of these action plans have been produced.
21. The National Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality in 2005 supported Bulgaria's accession process to the European Union and included measures for gender mainstreaming. The National Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality for 2006, encompasses a wide range of measures related to: state policy for the promotion of gender equality and strengthening the national institutional mechanism on gender equality, as well as capacity building of the administration; ensuring equal access of women and men to economic activities, including entrepreneurship; overcoming gender segregation of the labour market and the gender pay gap; reconciliation measures for both parents; gender equality in education and healthcare and protection against domestic violence and trafficking in human beings. As part of the National Action Plan for the promotion of Gender Equality for 2006, the government presented the Bill on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. Although it was not adopted, the Parliament enacted some features of the Bill through the Amendments to the Protection against Discrimination Act.
22. The National Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality for 2008–2009, highlights that each stage of planning, decision-making and assessments of the institutional work is bound by the principle of equality.
23. A National Strategy for the Promotion of Gender Equality 2009–2015 was adopted in 2009. The strategy aims on one hand to transpose recommendations of the Council of Europe, the strategic documents of the European Union, and the principles underlying the UN conventions on human rights and gender equality in particular. On the other hand, it outlines the targets that need to be met in order to remove all obstacles for reaching *de facto* gender equality in the country.
24. In 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 Annual National Action Plans for the Promotion of Gender Equality were adopted. The plans contain several sections reproducing the main priorities set up in the National Strategy. In addition, new ones were set up for the preparation of the 52nd session of the CEDAW Committee. The new National Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality for 2013 prioritises the higher participation of women in decision-making processes, and the prevention and counteraction of domestic violence.

Georgia

25. Recent progress made by Georgia in the field of gender equality is reflected in the following actions: In May 2012 the Government of Georgia produced its fourth and fifth periodic reports under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Women Councillors' Forum was established to increase women's role in local governance. Regional meetings are held regularly that gather female elected officials. The Gender Equality National Action Plan for 2014-2016 was adopted. Targeted municipalities

incorporated gender sensitive principles in 2014 local budgets. “Change Your Mind”- a massive public awareness campaign was launched. The Gender voluntary quota-inclusion of the different sex representatives on party lists- was increased from 20% to 30% and for the parties that comply with this requirement additional budget funding rose from 10% to 30 %. The vocational schools of Kachreti, Poti and Zugdidi State Teaching University trained 350 women. In 2013 Association of Women Farmers of Kakheti was established; in one year, organization attracted 121 members. In Kakheti and Samegrelo 179 leader women and 26 communities were selected to communicate problems of their villages to the local authorities. Out of 250 proposals, 51 were acknowledged by the Municipalities and included in the respective budgets for 2014.

Greece

26. On 2 November 2004, the government approved the General Secretariat for gender equality four-year action plan entitled National Policy Priorities and Axes for Action on Gender Equality (2004–2008). This initiative links gender equality issues to the national priorities of the country (development, employment and social cohesion), and places emphasis on their economic, developmental and political dimensions. The action plan focuses on the following axes of special actions: combating the equality deficit in the labour market; changing stereotypical perceptions and educational procedures; preventing and combating violence against women; enhancing women’s participation in decision-making. Gender mainstreaming in public administration at all levels has been a priority for Greece. Through the National Centre on Public Administration and Local Administration, a number of projects have been implemented throughout the country towards gender-responsive procedures. In addition, the General Secretariat for Gender Equality (GSGE) has been actively participating in the preparation of the National Strategic Development Plan (2007–2013) (NSDP).
27. In 2010, the Greek General Secretariat for Gender Equality drafted the National Programme for Substantive Gender Equality 2010–2013. The main strategic objectives of the programme are: the protection of human rights of women, with an emphasis on developing activities for groups of women who suffer multiple discrimination; the prevention and combating of the phenomenon of violence against women in family/private life, at work and in society as a whole; the support of women’s employment and economic autonomy; the promotion of women in decisionmaking; combating gender stereotypes. The programme is divided into three pillars, including actions for: improving, strengthening and enforcing Greek legislation; developing of specific policies for gender equality, and integrating of the gender equality perspective into public policies (gender mainstreaming).
28. In 2010, Units in the Municipalities on Social Policy and Gender Equality were established. This required, for the first time, that Greek municipalities develop gender equality policies. In addition to these units, municipalities were also given the option of developing Municipal Gender Equality Committees. In 2011, Greece implemented a Guide for Gender Equality Policies as a tool/guide for gender mainstreaming in all the operational programmes (specialisation, implementation, monitoring, auditing and assessment).
29. In 2013, the project on the development of a new Monitoring Mechanism for the Implementation of Gender Equality Policies was launched by the General Secretariat for Gender Equality. It will operate as the monitoring system of policies of all agencies of the government and local authorities and regions, and will also have a rating system of policy results regarding gender (gender impact assessment).

Moldova

30. Law no. 5 of 09.02.2006 on ensuring equality of opportunities between women and men provides definitions pertaining to gender equality (a complex approach to equality between women and men, direct and indirect discrimination, sexual harassment etc.), specifies priority areas to ensure equality between women and men in the public space (public offices, elections and political parties, mass-media), in the social and economic sector (equal access to employment, employees' cooperation with trade unions, discriminatory actions on the part of the employer, equal access to entrepreneurship) and also in education and healthcare. The law governs the institutional framework for ensuring equality between women and men and emphasizes the importance of gender statistics.
31. Law no. 121 of May 2012 on ensuring gender equality has a main purpose the prevention and combating of discrimination, as well as ensuring the equality of all persons on the territory of the Republic of Moldova in the political, economic, social, cultural and other areas of life, irrespectively of race, nationality, ethnic origin, language, religion or beliefs, sex, age, disabilities, opinions, political affiliation and any similar criterion. The Law also sets the institutional framework for the prevention and combating of discrimination and ensuring of equality. It is also to be noted that the law comprises sanctions for acts of discrimination. Thus, in accordance with article 17, acts of discrimination are liable to disciplinary, civil, non-criminal and criminal charges in keeping with the legislation in force. In December 2012, the Parliament adopted Law no. 298 on the activity of the Council for the prevention and elimination of discrimination and ensuring the equality.
32. The strategic documents that set the goal of ensuring gender equality in the Republic of Moldova until 2015 is the 2010-2015 National Programme for ensuring gender equality and the 2013-2015 Action Plan. The National Programme is aimed at ensuring a complex approach to equality between women and men in policy documents in all fields and at all levels of decision making and enforcement. The National Programme for ensuring gender equality includes 8 priority intervention sectors: employment and migration, gender-sensitive budgeting, social protection and family, healthcare, education, combating violence and human trafficking, raising public awareness and enhancing mass information means. The 2013-2015 Action Plan contains a new goal: Ensuring gender equality in the sector of security, legal order and military service.
33. In the field of data collection, the harmonized set of the development indicators regarding the gender issues in the context of MDG was launched in June 2008 and has the purpose to create a platform for the gender issue integration in the national policies; also it serves as a monitoring and efficient report tool regarding the gender equality promotion in Moldova.

Romania

34. The equal opportunities and treatment for men and women in the labour market is a fundamental principle of human rights, transposed both at legislative level and at the public policies level. This principle is set up in Law nr. 202/2002 on the equality of opportunities and treatment for men and women, which established the measures for promoting this principle in all the spheres of public life in Romania. In the year 2012, the main improvements which were brought to this legal act, were:
 - Defining the speciality terms in the field of gender equality (discrimination on sex criterium, direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassing, sexual harassing, multiple discrimination, equal edges for equal work, affirmative measures).
 - Free access of men and women on the labour market.
 - Equal access for men and women to education, health, culture and information.

- Responsibilities of the institutions which must implement the principle of gender equality.
 - Sanctions concerning the infringement of the principle of equal opportunities and treatment for men and women.
35. The novelties which have been brought through the modification of Law no. 202/2002 on equal opportunities and treatment for men and women were: integrating the legislative modifications intervened further to the elimination of the National Agency for Equal Opportunities for Men and Women and the setting up of the Department for Equal Opportunities for Men and Women within the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection, as a specialty Directorate; integrating, within the text of the Law, some stipulations of the Directive 2010/41/EU of the European Parliament and the Council, dated 7 July 2010, on applying the principle of equal opportunities and treatment for men and women who develop an independent activity and abrogating Directive 86/613/EEC; defining the responsibilities, organization, functioning and nominal composition of the National Commission on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women; modifying, completing and updating some measures concerning the activity of the County Commissions and the Commissions of Bucharest Municipality in the field of equal opportunities for men and women and updating the level of the fines in the case of the infringement of the law stipulations.
36. From an institutional point of view, The National Agency for Equal Opportunities for Men and Women was set up and functioned between the years 2005 - 2010; this institution had a legal personality being subordinated to the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection. In the year 2013 the process of elaboration and approval of a new strategy in the field of equal opportunities and treatment for men and women, for the period 2014 – 2017 was initiated.

Russia

37. Within the efforts taken in Russia in order to ensure the improvement of the status of women and the achievement of overall gender equality, women's rights are extended and the barriers hindering the full and free exercise of their rights are eliminated. At the same time, still continues the process of improving the legislation to protect and support family, motherhood and children.
38. To implement the task set forth by the President of Russia to harmonize motherhood with the work activities there are at present the conditions set up at the legislative level providing conditions for the work of women at home and use of a flexible work schedule. Greater importance is attached to the training of women with new skills, improvement of their qualifications, including also the method of distance learning. Therefore, the Federal Law "On Education in the Russian Federation" of 2012 provides the possibility of distance learning, which provides additional opportunities for training and education for women.
39. For more harmonious combination of motherhood with the work activities several measures are implemented in the framework of the Decrees of the President of Russia in 2012 for organization of free training and skills development for women after termination of their maternity and childcare leaves as well as for meeting the needs of the families in pre-school establishments.
40. These measures create additional opportunities for realization of the women's rights to work and contribute to raising the level of accessibility to quality education for children.
41. Measures are also being taken to fight against the decline of the family income in the period after the child reaches the age of 1.5 years. Particularly the acute shortage of funds is traced

in the families with children aged 1.5 to 3 years, when the maternity leave expires but it is difficult for the new mothers to return to full-time jobs.

42. Measures are also taken to increase the wages of the employees of state-financed organizations, in which women employees prevail with the aim to reduce gender inequalities and to increase the welfare level for women.
43. The issues on the status of women are addressed by the State Duma Committee on Family, Women and Children Affairs and the Coordination Council on Gender Issues of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection. The issues related to education, culture, children, family, labor relations, healthcare, social protection and services are administered by the Council of the Federation Committee on Science, Education and Culture and the Council of the Federation Committee on Social Policy. Within the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of Russia (Mintrud) there is a special Division on Demographic Policy and Gender Equality Issues under the Department of Demographic Policy and Social Protection.
44. The public non-governmental organization “Union of Women of Russia” functions since 1990. This Union unites on voluntary basis the councils, unions, associations, committees and clubs of women operating in the regions of Russia.
45. Women play an active role also at the regional level. In several entities of the Russian Federation there are commissions or councils under the Governors’ Office on family, women and children issues or the commissions or councils on demographic and family policies in the framework of which the issues of gender equality are addressed.
46. At the international level, the International Centre for Gender Budgeting and Management has been set up within the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration under the (RPA NEPA), which operates as a sub-regional unit for the CIS Member States.

Serbia

47. Two significant laws in this area that changed to a large degree legal approach on gender equality and rights of women in the state of Serbia are Anti-Discrimination Law and Law on Gender Equality. The Anti-Discrimination Law bans any discrimination on the grounds of gender or other factors. This law clearly states provisions which list protection of equal rights and freedoms of women and men and it explicitly lists prohibited acts, which represent discrimination on the grounds of gender. One of duties of the employer, in accordance with the Law on Gender Equality is to provide employees, regardless to their gender, equal opportunities and treatment in achieving their rights from public affairs and on labour basis. One of the important provisions, concerning the issue of equal treatment of women and men on labour market, is to enable equal opportunity in employment, equal opportunity for work promotions, as well as equal salary for the same work. Pursuant to this Law (Article 13) employers with over 50 employees, should adopt plan of measures for elimination or reduction of disproportional representation of men and women on annual level. Subject to Article 16, gender cannot be an obstacle in advancement at work. Also, pregnancy and parenthood leaves cannot be an obstacle for promotion, advancement, professional training, for deployment on unsuitable jobs as well as for termination of Employment Contract.
48. The issue of gender equality in the economy of Serbia is defined as one of six priority areas of the National Strategy for Improved Status of Women and Gender Equality Promotion¹² (2009-2015) and of the Action Plan for Implementation of the National Strategy for Improved Status of Women and Gender Equality Promotion (2010-2015), within strategic direction of development in Improving economic status of women and achieving gender equality. Special measures are focused on activities for Promotion of Employment and Labor

Policies which Contribute to Reconciliation of Labor Conditions and Family Life, as well as on promotion of free choices of flexible labor through improvement of social protection and services, by creating equal opportunities for their utilization.

49. Women's Parliamentary Network was set up in the NARS on 14 February 2013 with the aim of improving gender equality and the position of women in the country, promoting the adoption of new laws and policies, and monitoring the implementation of existing legislation

Turkey

50. Several amendments of the Constitution provide for gender equality. With the amendment made on Article 41 of the Constitution, in 2001, the first paragraph of the article in question was edited as "Family is the core of Turkish society and is based on equality between spouses." Along with the amendments made on the years 2004 and 2010, according to Article 10 of the Constitution, "Women and men have equal rights. State is liable to carry into effect this equality. Measures to be taken with this purpose cannot be interpreted as contradicting to the equality principle." With the Constitutional amendments adopted in consequence of the Referendum dated September 12, 2010, a new definition allowing "positive discrimination" for diverse groups including women, took its place in the Constitution.
51. Two fundamental codes of Turkey's legal system, the Civil Code (entered into force on January 1, 2002) and the Penal Code (entered into force on June 1, 2005) were reviewed comprehensively and significant achievements were made in the articles concerning women. Moreover, in line with the New Labor Law that entered into force in 2003, it was decreed that discrimination in terms of basic human rights, including gender, cannot be made for any reason in employer-employee relationship. In this reforms period, contributions of the civil society organizations played an important role. Furthermore, with the amendment made on the Income Tax Law in 2007, incomes that women generate by selling the products they manufacture at home, without launching an enterprise, at places temporarily designated by public organizations and institutions, are exempt from tax. In March 24, 2009 the Law on Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men entered into force, and the Committee on Equality of Opportunity for Women and Men was established within TBMM (Turkish Grand National Assembly) with the fundamental aim to protect and develop women's rights as well as to follow up the national and international developments recorded on these issues. With Law No. 6111 of 2011, regulations were made in order to improve participation in the labour force of women and youth, encourage generation of new employment, and reduce unemployment risk by increasing employees' qualifications, promote vocational and technical training and increase their skills and efficiency. Moreover, incentives for youth and women were extended.
52. In the field of policy development, the National Action Plan on Gender Equality (2008-2013) focuses on 7 critical fields: education, health, economy, participation in the decision-making processes, poverty, media and environment. An example of policy implementation is the Project on Enhancing Women's Equal Access to Economic Opportunities in Turkey, run by the General Directorate of Women's Status through the World Bank. It is an important work realized with the aim to enable women to participate in the professional life and raise their economic status. Within the scope of the project which will continue between the years 2012-2017, the aim is to raise awareness on women entrepreneurship, facilitate access to information and funds, provide required information and data to develop policies on better job opportunities for women, ensure women's economic and social empowerment by developing cooperative skills, and popularize women's cooperative system.

Ukraine

53. The Legislation of Ukraine does not contain rules, directly providing gender-based benefits. The practical embodiment of the principle of gender equality is ensured by the Law of Ukraine “On ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men”, adopted on 8 September 2005. The purpose of this Law is to ensure parity of women and men in all vital areas of activity in the society by way of providing legal support for equal rights and opportunities for women and men, eliminating sexual discrimination and applying special temporary measures aimed at eliminating the imbalance between the opportunities for women and men to implement equal rights that are granted thereto by the Constitution of Ukraine and the Ukrainian laws.
54. In September 2013 the Council of Ministers of Ukraine approved the State Program to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and men for the period until 2016, which envisages the introduction of an integrated approach to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and men.
55. Following the adoption of the Law of Ukraine “On ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men” started the process of establishment of institutional mechanism for the implementation of state policies to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and men. In the framework of the implementation of the administrative reforms, the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine was authorized as the central body of executive power to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and men. Under the Ministry of the Social Policy operated the Expert Council on combating discrimination on gender basis. In 27 regions of Ukraine the vice-chairmen of regional state administrations were identified as responsible for gender policy issues. 13 gender resource centers and 21 educational centers on gender issues are established and operating. In its 19 regional state administrations operate Coordination Councils for issues of family, gender equality, demographic development, prevention of domestic violence and combating human trafficking. Advisers to the chairmen of the regional state administrations on gender issues have been appointed in 16 regions.
56. The Parliament is currently considering amendments to some legislative acts of Ukraine on ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men in the electoral process and determining the number of candidates of the same gender in the electoral lists with a view to promote equal access of women and men to participation in decision-making at the legislative level and local governments.

IV. INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

57. Women’s rights and gender equality are fundamental human rights, guaranteed in numerous human rights treaties, resolutions, declarations, platforms and programmes of action. The main international human rights treaty for women is the **United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**, which is ratified by all BSEC Member States, and its *Optional Protocol*. At the same time, women’s rights and non-discrimination are fundamental components of other UN norms, including the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, and the *Declaration on Violence against Women*. The *UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education* (1960), the *ILO Equal Remuneration Convention* (No. 100), the *ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention* (No. 111), and the *ILO Employment Policy Convention* (No. 122) are also among the international documents partially or completely devoted to the rights of women.

58. Other policy frameworks that commit states to gender equality and women's rights include the *Vienna Declaration and Platform for Action*, the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, the *Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development*, and the *Millennium Development Goals*.
59. **The Council of Europe** has taken steps at different levels in order to promote equality between women and men. *The European Convention on Human Rights* prohibits any distinction based on grounds of sex. *The European Social Charter* provides a number of specific rights for women, namely equal remuneration, protection of mothers and working women and the social and economic protection of women and children. *The Additional Protocol of 1988* included the right to equal opportunities and treatment with regard to employment and careers, without discrimination based on sex. Furthermore, the revised Social Charter contains a specific non-discrimination clause on a variety of grounds, one of which is sex. Apart from these legal instruments the Council of Europe is committed to a whole range of other measures and activities to promote equality between women and men.
60. Equality between women and men is a fundamental value of the **European Union**, enshrined in its Treaties and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Article 13 of the Treaty of Amsterdam entitles to combat discrimination based, among other grounds, on sex. Article 141 is the legal basis for measures for equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment. Comprehensive gender equality legislation has been elaborated relating to the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women, on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions etc.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

61. Empowering women and giving them a voice are vital in unleashing their full productive potential. The BSEC region has come a long way in this regard – women in the region enjoy larger freedoms than women in other regions of the world and have a say about their lives. This is mainly the result of legal reforms and policy development that have taken place during the recent years with the aim to enhance gender equality.
62. However, more efforts are needed so as to address the gaps and weaknesses in implementation of the laws and to translate them into concrete action. International experience has made clear the fact that gender equality requires a comprehensive response, building on the contribution of all stakeholders. An effective legal framework requires monitoring, enforcement, regular evaluation and updating, as well as ongoing dialogue with business, social partners, equality bodies and civil society representatives to ensure that it is apt for its purpose. Equality bodies at national level which assist victims of gender discrimination, promote rights and develop research are essential to application of the rights in practice, and the rights of associations and trade unions to defend victims of discrimination are vital too.
63. While gender equality, in general, can be improved through adequate legal frameworks and institutional capacity, the greatest gains may be in the introduction of programmes and policies that directly address the causal reasons, including traditional belief systems and attitudes. Challenging behaviour and attitudes about gender and family, are needed to remove barriers to gender equality. Traditional attitudes and deeply rooted cultural norms, held by both males and females about gender roles in the BSEC region, are the greatest barriers to achieving gender equality.