

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA
STANDING COMMITTEE
OF THE EFTA STATES

4/EQ/W/005
Brussels
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**WORKING GROUP ON EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES
AND FAMILY POLICY**

**Comments by the EEA EFTA States on the Communication from the Commission
on a Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality and a proposal for a
Programme relating to this strategy**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The EEA EFTA States welcome the Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality and the proposal for a programme related to this strategy. The EEA EFTA States are interested in continued cooperation in this field, and as soon as the programme is adopted at the EU side, the EEA EFTA States will urge for a rapid inclusion of the programme decision into the EEA Agreement.

I INTRODUCTION

1. The Commission adopted on 7 June 2000 the Communication “Towards a Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality” and a proposal for a Council Decision on a Programme relating to the Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality (2001-2005)¹. The programme is open to the participation of EEA EFTA States, and the proposal is currently being studied by EFTA experts in view of incorporating the programme into the EEA Agreement. As soon as the programme is adopted at the EU side, the EEA EFTA States will urge for having a rapid inclusion of the programme decision into the EEA Agreement, in order to ensure the legal basis for a full participation in the programme, as provided for in Article 81 of the EEA Agreement.

2. EFTA EU co-operation in the field of equal opportunities has been going on since the entry into force of the EEA on 1 January 1994, and the EEA EFTA States have been fully participating in the Medium-term Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (1996-2000). Representatives from the EEA EFTA States have taken part in the Committees and expert groups established under this programme. The EEA EFTA States contribute financially in the same manner as EU Member States, and consequently EEA EFTA based organisations and institutions have taken part as promoters and as partners of transnational activities on equal terms as those from EU Member States.

¹ (COM (2000) 335 final of 7.6.2000).

II GENERAL REMARKS

3. In view of the information and consultation procedure provided for in the EEA Agreement, the EEA EFTA States are pleased to submit comments on the Communication from the Commission on a Framework Strategy on Gender Equality, and more particularly on the proposed programme relating to this strategy.

4. The EEA EFTA States find the Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality both highly interesting and ambitious. In this regard, we would point, in particular, to the proposed annual Commission work programme on gender mainstreaming and positive action measures throughout Community policies and programmes. The regular monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Strategy will be important to ensure success.

5. The EEA EFTA States also welcome the proposal for a Programme relating to the Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality. The EEA EFTA States fully support the objectives and activities proposed for the programme. We value the broad scope that will allow an integrated approach for tackling the very serious gender gaps and blatant discrimination that persist in terms of decision-making, the economy and gender based violence. We welcome the continuation of the two-track approach of further developing the gender mainstreaming strategy while pursuing at the same time an active policy of specific measures of positive action. Of particular interest will be the further development and refinement of the methodological approach, including indicators and benchmarking with a view to effectively monitoring and comparing results.

6. However, we note that the Swedish proposal to set up a Gender Institute has not been incorporated in the proposal. We think this kind of institute could serve a very useful purpose in co-ordination and monitoring of European level women's and gender studies and research. The Gender Institute could further be helpful in developing another concern of ours, related to the role of men. Men are part of the problem and must be part of the solution. Differences and similarities in male gender roles and perceptions of masculinity in Europe need to be studied, with a view to a better understanding of the gender dimension – as relating to both women and men, and to mobilise men in favour of gender equality.

7. The EEA EFTA States welcome the proposal to set up a new programme committee and are looking forward to a continued fruitful cooperation with the Commission and with representatives of EU Member States on the implementation of the new programme. The EEA EFTA States look forward to future co-operation in the framework of transnational studies, projects and EEA wide expert groups and committees of senior officials, as well as monitoring, reporting and other activities as foreseen in the programme proposal.

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