



## Progress on equality reached in the Spanish Presidency in the EU

Marta Plaza, a research assistant at IDEAS, examines the progress on equality initiated by the Spanish government in the European mandate which recently ended.

*"A society's degree of civilization is measured by the extent to which women enjoy freedom".*

**Charles Fourier**, French Utopian Writer.

On January 1<sup>st</sup>, Spain began its fourth rotating presidential responsibility that allows the country to exercise its influence upon the European Union's the agenda which consequently spurs reforms of its interest on a supranational level. The Spanish Presidency of the Union during the first half of 2010 has implied, therefore, not only a responsibility to, but, above all, an opportunity to translate the strong pro-European feeling that the Spanish population repeatedly expresses in public opinion polls, specific tasks and other completed actions.

The Spanish Presidency has coincided with the beginning of a new phase for the European Union in which the Parliament and the Commission have been renewed and a new treaty was implemented on December 1, 2009. One of the Treaty of Lisbon's provisions is the formation of a trio of presidencies in order to provide greater continuity to the initiatives of the Union. This implies that the trio's planning of the presidencies last a period of 18 months, and links to three member states that are in presidential terms successively. With this provision, Spain, Belgium and Hungary have developed, under the new rules in Europe, a project of work focused on equality which has been approved during the Spanish Presidency and will be implemented over the three terms that make up the trio.

Equality is a top priority for the Spanish government, as the measures without precedents taken in recent years in our country attest. As a result, Spain has managed to include this concern as one of the cornerstones to the trio-presidency's agenda. The most relevant measures in this agenda have been adopted or have received a significant boost in the process towards final approval during the Spanish Presidency which ended in June of 2010.





Progress on equality as a political priority for the EU Presidency has had three foci of attention. First, the promotion of gender equality, with a long tradition of the community-oriented foray, is emphasized. Second, the fight against gender violence, an area in which there has been significant advancement, is regarded as a pressing problem. Along with this, a new norm was initiated during our presidency of the EU which is of great depth in the field of equal treatment and non discrimination for any reason or circumstance, personal or social, in any field, not just the labor market.

Let us then analyze in more detail the progress in equality produced under the Spanish Presidency of the EU in different areas of focus including in that of European equality policy:

### 1. Gender Equality

- The presidency has set an ambitious goal of moving towards labor equality between women and men, paying special attention to the measures on wage differentials based on sex, on part-time jobs, equal opportunities in the business world and the reconciliation between one's professional, family, and personal life. In this regard, the achievement that has led the inclusion of a gender unbiased perspective across the board in the whole of the *Strategy for Growth and Employment*, known as *Europe 2020*, is highlighted. The *Europe 2020 Strategy* adopted at the European Council of June 17, 2010, replacing the Lisbon 2000 Strategy, aims to promote the employment, and the achievement of a smart, sustainable, and integrative growth in Europe. Among these is the goal of reaching as high as a 75% for the employment rate of men and women between the ages of 20 and 64.  
The data indicate that to achieve this objective there should be a special effort to incorporate a greater number of women into the labor market. Currently 60% of people who obtain a degree in higher education in the EU are women, something that is not reflected in the labor market, where, while 76% of men are working, the employment rate for women stands at 63%. Furthermore, the wage gap, which also will affect the 2020 Strategy, averaged 17.4% in the EU last year.
- The European Forum "*Women in Sustainable Rural Development*" was held from April 27<sup>th</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> in Cáceres with the objective of realizing a meeting to discuss, debate, and highlight the women's key role in building a future with a high quality of life and equal opportunities in rural areas.
- The strategic focus in the sphere politics of equality in the European Union was the Quadrennial Plan for Equality between women and men. During our Presidency, the evaluation of the Plan for Equality between women and men, which ends in 2010, was carried out and a new Plan for the period of 2011-2015 began its development.





- Celebration of the *European Forum "Beijing +15"*. To mark the Spanish Presidency of the European Union, on February 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Cadiz hosted the Women's Forum Beijing +15 at the European Forum in celebration of the fifteen years of implementation of the Plan of Action from the Fourth World Conference on Women, which was held in Beijing in 1995 and sponsored by the United Nations in order to create a more just path in the EU and explore the possibilities of progress starting in 2010.
- Final adoption of the *Directive on equal treatment between women and men linked to an autonomous activity* was approved by the Union Council on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 2010. Thanks to the compulsory transposition to the ordinance by member countries of the Union, for the first time, Europe is planning to recognize the spouses' or partners' of self-employed persons right to social protection as well as the right to receive a maternity benefits for a minimum of 14 weeks. This is a historic breakthrough that equips women workers with independence of the labor regime with their right motherhood.

## 2-Gender Violence

On the subject of gender violence, the March 8, 2010 Council supported the creation of a *European Observatory on Gender Violence*. This observatory will be responsible for drafting common indicators for the development of a common diagnosis on this terrible problem, in collaboration with the European Gender Institute. The observatory should be built upon the basis of existing organizational structures within the Union.

Along with this were highlighted the proceedings of a directive on an *Order for the protection of victims of violence against women*, which will allow any security measure dictated by one Member State to be automatically enforced in another Member State to which the victim moves, thus expanding the area of safety for the victims of gender violence.

Finally, the Spanish proposal for a free European *phone line with information and assistance* to victims won the backing of the Council, which in turn has given the Member States the responsibility of its creation.

## 3-Equal Treatment

The Spanish Presidency has presented in this first semester a progress report on the proposal for the *Council's Directive on the application of the principle of equal treatment between people regardless of their age, religion or belief, disabilities or sexual orientation*. This Directive will complement the two directives respectively adopted in 2000 on Racial Equality and Equal Employment, regulating measures for equality in areas beyond employment and reasons other than race, already covered by Community legislation which refers to and brings the principle of equal treatment and non discrimination as one of their extreme consequences.





## ANALYSIS AND OPINION ARTICLE

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The ambitious new directive on equal treatment is a proposal, which has been in the works since 2008, which has made significant progress especially in the area of disability, establishing commitments for all Member States on the accessibility and adaptability of infrastructure and buildings thanks to our initial momentum. During the next six months, corresponding to the Belgian Presidency, the European Union must reach a final agreement on this matter.

In conclusion, Spain has taken advantage of the opportunity that was brought about by the Spanish Presidency to provide a significant boost to the principle of equality, from which will be built a future based on the incorporation of the promotion and progressive realization of this principle as a structural element of our societies with the aim of realizing a new, intelligent, sustainable, and integrative growth model for the following decade.

In a context in which the economic climate has caused the embryo of the Union's quick progresses to be a common European economic policy, the Spanish presidency has not overlooked the deepening concern of a more egalitarian and just society. This desire to improve all citizenship and especially the most disadvantaged, has characterized and distinguished the of the Spanish progressive government's term. Thus, as a result the effort of our government has put forth in this half of the EU presidency; important new social gains that will become part of a community tradition and will improve the quality of our societies have been reached. All this will to not only lead us to a more competitive and dynamic Europe from an economic point of view, but also to a more equal, cohesive and just Europe from a social standpoint.

