

Memorandum of Cooperation

9 November 2012

The purpose of this Memorandum of Cooperation is to alert the general public in Estonia to the under-representation of women in top management positions in public and private sector organisations and to highlight the importance of gender diversity in politics and the economy as a tool for improved political decision-making and better corporate governance amid a challenging economic environment. International research has shown that greater gender balance in key decision-making positions leads to more diversified leadership behaviours, less conflict and more sustainable solutions.

The report "Women in political decision making - quality and equality" presented in the European Parliament on 3 October 2012 points out that women are less visible and less represented during election campaigns. It is proposed that all European Union member states introduce the principle of gender parity on electoral lists to improve the situation. Viviane Reding, Vice-President of the European Commission, has repeatedly emphasized the need to reinforce the gender focus in the elaboration of the EU's growth strategy Europe 2020.

Women's representation in national parliaments in the EU has increased from 16% in 1997 to 24% in 2009, with women accounting for 27 % of government ministers in EU member states. This is still below the critical mass of at least 30% women to make a significant and meaningful impact on political decision-making.

Serving as role models are the our neighbours - the Nordic countries which enjoy the highest levels women's representation in national parliaments: 44.7% in Sweden, 42.5% in Finland, 39.6% in Norway, 39.7% in Iceland, and 39.1% in Denmark. There are a range of factors behind women's top-level political participation such as running public awareness campaigns, promoting women's empowerment, challenging gender stereotypes, applying social measures and introducing gender quota.

In Estonia, women hold currently 19.8% of the seats in the Riigikogu, 29.6% of the seats in municipal councils; there is just one woman government minister. We are confident that a more equal representation of women and men on political parties' electoral lists, concerning both parliamentary as well as local elections, would provide equal opportunities for men and women to run for elected office.

We are confident that the use of the so-called zipper system which requires alternation between one male and one female candidate at the top of party candidate lists at the elections will become good practice to be applied across political parties at the next local and parliamentary elections.

By signing this Memorandum of Cooperation we would like to communicate the message that women's increased involvement in political and economic decision-making is necessary and that it will translate into gains for each and every organisation and our society generally.

Signed by