

Equal Opportunities Round Table

Words from Torgny Svenungsson, Counsellor of Development Cooperation at the Embassy of Sweden in Serbia, 6 February, 2014

State Secretary Mihajlovic, participants all,

It is my pleasure, in representation of the Embassy of Sweden and Sida, to participate at this event presenting the results of the survey conducted by Equal Opportunities.

For Sweden, facilitating for women to participate in working life and to have access to decision making positions is a matter of rights but also of economic potential. From Sida's perspective of development and change, women are a sometimes forgotten potential for development and progress.

Sweden has come a long way in gender equality and in involving women in the labour market. Whereas, previously, the focus was precisely on increasing the participation of women in the work force, the focus is now on increasing the number of women in decision making positions. The Swedish Government is actively using its influence as owner of state companies to demand more equality in recruitment and to increase the number of women in managerial positions and in boards of directors. There is no quota established but state owned companies are required to show results on this. This way, the participation of women in boards of directors of state companies has been increased to 49%. Furthermore, the number of state owned companies that have a female president of the board of directors has been more than doubled

since 2006 and now stands at 43%. The number of women in managerial positions has also been increased. As a reflection of this, the proportion of women in management groups of state owned companies now stands at 38%, which is up from 28% in 2006. By this, it goes to show that a consistent policy, with clear goals, transparency, focus on competence and of applying a gender perspective in recruitment, gives results.

While progress has been shown in state owned companies, the overall picture of Sweden still presents many challenges. The male dominance in boards of directors is overall very strong. Out of all companies in Sweden, around 80% are male dominated. Last year, a Swedish magazine revealed that there are in fact more men with the name of Johan (Jovan in Serbian) than women in boards of companies registered on the Stockholm Stock Exchange. The debate is on about the pros and cons of introducing a quota system also for these companies. As you may know, the European Parliament last year adopted a proposal to introduce quotas for companies of more than 250 employees. It still remains to be seen if this will be passed into law.

Another facet of this topic is to look at women as entrepreneurs. Today, in Sweden, women make up roughly one fourth of entrepreneurs. Through different competence development and support mechanisms set up by the Swedish government, effects in increases in women entrepreneurship can be noticed. Efforts are directed both at increasing the number of female entrepreneurs and at encouraging them to employ more staff. Over the period 2006-2010, the number of businesses driven by women increased some 13% and their businesses grew in terms of turnover and staff.

Again, in this area, Sweden still faces challenges. Women are underrepresented as entrepreneurs. Studies show that women face some particular challenges such as lack of access to business sector networks. Studies also reveal that there is still a difference between men and women on their motives for starting a business. Whereas men see it as a means for pursuing an innovation or an idea for business, women tend to see it as a practical way of combining professional and family life.

I think this last observation is interesting and telling for the whole issue of equal opportunities. The whole spectre of life has to be taken into consideration. Here society has an important role in creating conditions for men AND women to combine professional and family life. Again, government has an important role in this and can make a positive change possible.

Finally, a couple of words about Sweden's development cooperation with Serbia. Gender equality is one of our prioritized areas. We apply a gender perspective to all that we do and also target a substantial portion of our support to direct measures to enhance gender equality. With our support, the Serbian Government's Gender Equality Directorate, is implementing Serbia's Gender Equality Strategy and its National Action Plan. This roundtable is part of that support. Our support on gender equality forms part of a long-term and substantial support from Sweden to Serbia's approximation to the European Union. Our total support is around 12-13 million Euro annually, placing Sweden as the third biggest bilateral donor country.

To conclude, I hope that the study presented today will spur increased debate and action in order to enhance equal opportunities for men and women in

business and working life. From the Embassy, we are looking forward to following this and also to facilitate and provide support along the way.

Thank you.