GENDER COMPONENT IN NATIONAL POLICIES ON BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS AND IN GLOBAL ECONOMY

Expert commentary by the Working Group on Women's Rights and Gender Realities within the OSCE Platform for Civic Solidarity

The Working group sees its analysis in line with its cross-dimensional approach (see documentation from 2018) which connects security aspects with the human dimension and economic and environmental issues.

Structural inequalities and Human rights violations in the unjust global (neoliberal) economy remain widely unaddressed. The connection with military expenditures and the economic (and environmental) impact of a growing militarisation on social security in a cross-dimensional sense of the concept are lacking.

New trends in business and markets are alarming and many feminists are worried about the possible new forms of discrimination. There are many reasons to worry: The rationalization and digitalization of modes of production, the dismissals in certain sectors, the increasing expenditure for the army and high tech security technology, the destabilizing impact of austerity programs in the social sector: All these developments and trends have a strong gender dimension.

Women will not be affected the same way as men are, and their chances will not increase in the same way as men's will – especially also as economic actors. Individual stories give insights into these discrepancies. However, to understand them, we should not reach for explanations such as individual responsibility, incapacities or even laziness, but analyse the social economic causes of discrimination.

Human rights abuses by corporations are not gender neutral. Including a gender perspective will address an essential dimension of human rights violations and help to ensure that States take serious their obligations to respect, protect and fulfil women's and girls' human rigths. A gender perspective is not about treating women as "vulnerable group", but analysing how business may have different, disproportionate, or anticipated impacts on women or men because of their different gender based social, legal, cultural roles and rights.

Business oriented politics both causes and replicates the underlying patriarchal structure because it corresponds with the logic of the profit-oriented market and finally benefit from economic advantages - regardless of the number of women as business

leaders. The organization of the private sector is based on its productivity and the maximization of profit. There are different ways to increase productivity: Rationalization of production, investment in new technology, or simply by influencing the costs of the labour force such as staff redundancy, flexibilisation of contracts, informalisation of certain jobs etc. The costs for the staff should remain low, is even decreasing while the annual profit is increasing. Otherwise, the business would collapse; unfortunately, all companies are organized according to this logic.

Women are specifically affected by gender-based corporate abuse: low-paid (pay gap until 25%), undervalued jobs, vulnerable employment (until 43%), unpaid care (aggravated by imposed austerity measures), forced labour (25%) as domestic workers, in clandestine factories, on farms, in the sex industry. Women – especially in rural communities - are victimised by pollution, when companies monopolize water for their operations and thus reduce access for human and animal consumption.

The claims for "equal wage for equal work" or the importance to have more women in economic and political leadership positions were largely accepted. In many European countries, gender equality is enshrined constitutionally. However, in real live, it is different. Gender is still used as a category of non-justified discrimination, reflected in Statistics, which shows that women earn less than men do for equal work. Women provide significant part of the unpaid care work. The numbers are not random though, but a product of economic dynamics and political power relations. A sound understanding of the interfaces of different stakeholders. These are the private sector (market), the government (public sector), the civil society and the households.

Based on the above, we CALL:

Consider that the integration of women into the market does not automatically lead to empowerment. New dependencies can emerge, social networks may break down or women may experience exclusion due to lack of time and lack of access to ressources and assets. Many programmes pushing women into business may end up with personal indebtedness and mental stress. Despite the good intention of such "business for women programmes and incentives," the pressure to succeed will go at the expense of the consideration of social complexity and small-scale dynamics and therefore may even undermine the initiatives for gender justice;

Conduct **Human rights based gender impact assessments** including full and active participation of women from all affected communities and take into account impact

of all operations on gender roles and gender based discrimination (sexual and reproductive health, SGBV, division of labour on family and community level and access to and control of economic resources. On preventive measures, due diligence procedures must include HR risks assessments;

Pay due attention **Women human rights defenders**, particularly in contexts of armed conflicts and post-conflict situations, face greater risks of violence, criminalisation, stigmatisation and harassment. Perpetrators include state and corporate actors, as well as state and private security forces. States must recognise women human rights defenders in all their diversity, cease criminalisation and other violations of their human rights, adopt protection mechanisms and make all perpetrators accountable before the justice system;

Remove obstacles to **women's access to justice and effective remedies**. Rights holders affected by business activities should be in the centre of **remedy mechanisms** (risk of discrimination, barriers). Rights holders should incur no harm or fear of harm but instead strive for a transformative potential;

Conduct an analysis of the impact of migration on the labor market allowing a growing number of **slavery working conditions**. These people get less than a minimum wage or even no pay, no social insurance, suffer of pressure and (SGB) violence: a vicious circle of lack of rights, exploitation, homelessness and social distress, violence. They often work in slaughter houses, the transport or the care sector.;

Recognize the importance of care work.The effective creation, regulation and funding of care services can increase the access, affordability and quality of care and reduce time burdens placed on unpaid care-givers. Parental leaves, family allowances and other transfers can be financed through taxes or social insurance programmes, thereby socializing some of the costs assumed by unpaid caregivers. From a feminist perspective, the focus lies on the relation between the market value of labour in relation to the time used for it on one side and the resulting productivity-gap between paid and unpaid care work on the other side. The findings show it clearly: there is a strong gender bias, where women turn out to be the losers, especially those providing hours of care work unpaid and invisible. Their productivity is not valorised as such. In addition, the government also misses to compensate for it, be it in form of a fundamental rights based public services or through subsidies for non-profit organizations and services deliverers of care services.