

Brussels, 1 March 2011

EU Justice Commissioner Viviane Reding meets European business leaders to push for more women in boardrooms

Corporate Europe is still a man's world: just one in 10 board members at Europe's biggest companies are women and in 97% of cases the board is chaired by a man. Studies show that businesses with more women at the top outperform "men only" companies. Their operating income is higher and they are better at attracting talent and understanding customers. Making the most of Europe's female talent in the workforce is not just good for business – it also benefits the economy and society as a whole. Women represent 60% of university graduates, but continue to be under-represented in economic decision-making posts. At a specially convened summit in Brussels today, European Commission Vice-President Viviane Reding will meet CEOs and chairs of boards of publicly listed companies from 10 European countries (see Annex). Vice-President Reding will chair the business leaders' meeting together with Gertrude Tumpel-Gugerell, Member of the Executive Board of the European Central Bank. They will discuss how to get more women into top jobs and whether self-regulation or regulation should be the way to make significant changes quickly. In the afternoon, the Commission's Justice department will hold a "mini-hearing" with social partners on the same issue (see Annex).

Today's meeting between the Commission and business leaders and social partners is the first step towards a better gender balance in boardrooms and in senior management at Europe's biggest companies. This issue was initially raised in September 2010 when the European Commission, following a proposal by Vice-President Reding, said in its [Gender Equality Strategy](#) (see [IP/10/1149](#)) that it will "consider targeted initiatives to improve the gender balance in decision making." On the basis of new figures published today, the Commission will have an exchange of views with companies and social partners to see what measures they have taken and intend to take in the near future to improve the gender balance in board rooms. Over the next 12 months, the Commission will closely monitor progress. After that period, the Commission will assess whether further measures are required.

"I want to send a clear message to corporate Europe: women mean business," said Vice-President Reding, the EU's Justice Commissioner. "We need to use all of our society's talents to ensure that Europe's economy takes off. This is why the dialogue between the Commission and the social partners is so important. I believe that self-regulation could make a difference if it is credible and effective across Europe. However, I will come back to the matter in a year. If self-regulation fails, I am prepared to take further action at EU level."

The new report on Gender Balance in Business Leadership finds that on average women make up 12% of board members in the biggest publicly-listed companies across the EU and only 3% of board chairs (see Annex). The figures vary by country, from 26% female board members in Sweden and Finland to 2% in Malta.

While progress on reaching a reasonable balance (40% of each sex) has been slow in Europe, some countries are making progress. Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands and Denmark have introduced corporate governance codes and/or voluntary charters that have led to more women getting on boards. Legislation on quotas has already been introduced in Norway and is now being implemented in France and Spain. It's also under discussion in the Netherlands, Italy and Belgium.

Background

Promoting more equality in decision-making is one of the goals in the Women's Charter (see [IP/10/237](#)), which was initiated by President José Manuel Barroso and Vice-President Reding in March 2010. The Commission then followed these commitments by adopting a Gender Equality Strategy in September 2010 for the next five years (see [IP/10/1149](#) and [MEMO/10/430](#)), which includes exploring targeted initiatives to get more women into top jobs in economic decision-making.

There is both an economic and a business case for better gender balance in company boardrooms and management. More women now graduate than men in Europe (59% vs. 41%), yet their professional careers lag behind men's. This underused pool of qualified workers represents an untapped potential for the economy. At the same time, companies can benefit from more women at the top. Studies show a number of strong links between gender balance and performance in creativity, innovation, financial reporting, auditing and internal controls. Women-friendly companies can also attract more female customers and female talent.

The report on gender equality during 2010 points out that while trends are positive overall, progress remains slow. The gap between the EU employment rates for women and men narrowed in 2009-2010 from 13.3 to 12.9 percentage points and the female employment rate is now 62.5%. However, unemployment rates for both men and women rose due to the crisis, while women are still far more likely to work part time than men.

Beyond the labour market, women still shoulder the bulk of care responsibilities. The labour market participation of mothers is 11.5 percentage points lower than that of women without children, while the rate for fathers is 8.5 percentage points higher than that for men without children. The challenge of reconciling work, family and private life is one of the many causes of the gender pay gap: women across the EU earn 17.5% less on average than men and there has been no reduction of the gender pay gap in the last few years.

Further information

- Report on gender equality and business leadership:
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=6562&langId=en>
- Database on women and men in decision-making:
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=764&langId=en>
- Gender equality in the EU:
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=418>
- Homepage of Viviane Reding, Vice-President and Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship:
http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/reding/index_en.htm

Business Leaders Summit on Women Quota / Participants

In the Chair:

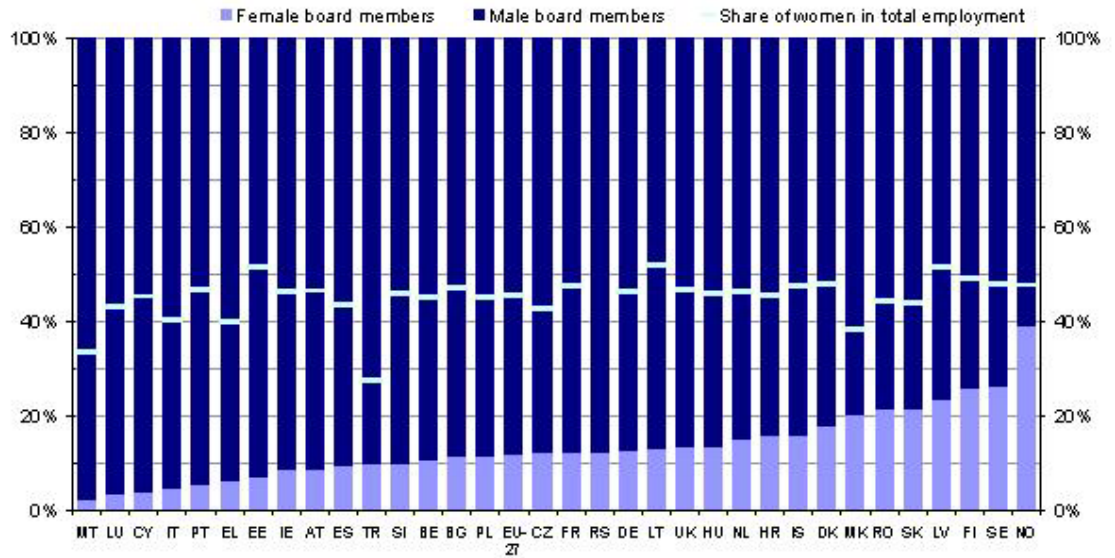
Viviane Reding, EU Justice Commissioner and Vice-President of the European Commission and **Gertrude Tumpel-Gugerell**, Member of the Executive Board of the European Central Bank

Name of the Company	CEO / Chairman	Sector	Country
Wolters Kluwer	Adri BAAN (Chairman supervisory board)	Media	Netherlands
Guerlain	Laurent BOILLOT (CEO)	Cosmetics	France
ZON Multimedia	Rodrigo COSTA (CEO)	Communication	Portugal
Ageas	Jozef DE MEY (Chairman supervisory board)	Insurance	Belgium
Dexia	Jean-Luc DEHAENE (Chairman board of directors)	Banking	Belgium
Kongsberg Automotive Holding	Ulla-Britt FRÄJDIN-HELLQVIST (Chairman board of directors)	Manufacture	Norway
Strabag SE	Alfred GUSENBAUER (Chairman supervisory board)	Construction industry	Austria
BASF	Jürgen HAMBRECHT (CEO)	Chemical	Germany
Groupe Delhaize	Georges JACOBS DE HAGEN (Chairman board of directors)	Food Retailer	Belgium
OMV (Österreichischen Mineralölverwaltung)	Peter MICHAELIS (Chairman of the three supervisory boards)	Energy	Austria
Österreichischen Post AG		Postal Services	
Telekom Austria AG		Telecommunication	
Statoil	Svein RENNEMO (Chairman board of directors)	Energy	Norway
NovoNordisk	Sten SCHEIBYE (Chairman board of directors)	Pharmaceutical	Denmark
Luxempart S.A.	François TESCH (CEO)	Financial	Luxembourg
Allami Nyomda Plc	Gabor ZSAMBOKI (CEO)	Printing	Hungary

List of participants of the mini-hearing on women quota

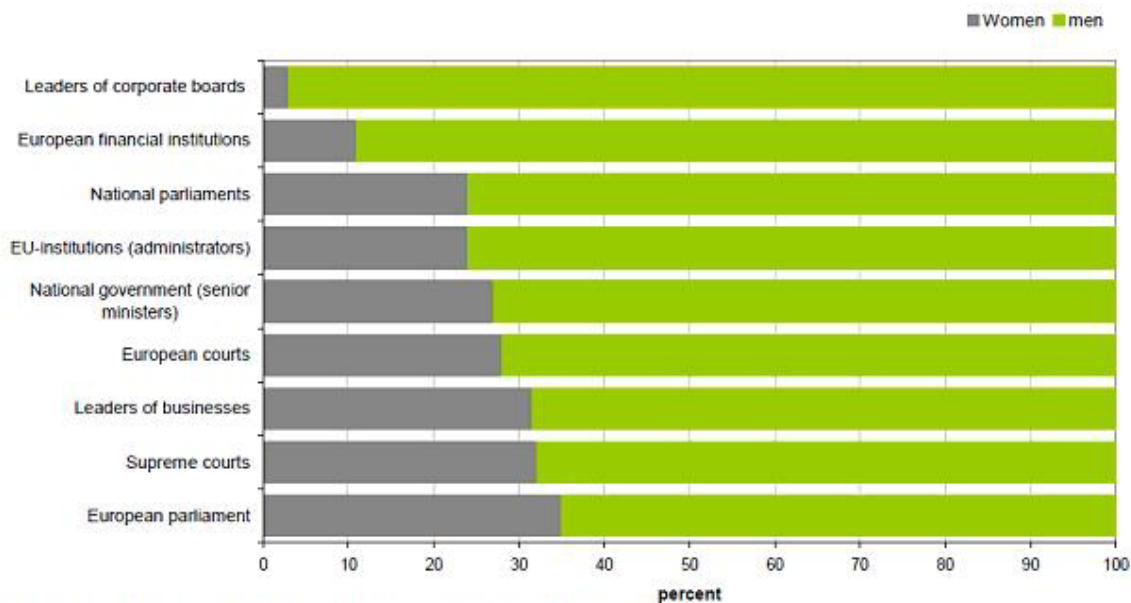
Network / Organisation
BUSINESSEUROPE
European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)
European Centre of Employers and Enterprises (CEEP)
European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (UEAPME)
European Women's Lawyers' Association
European Professional Women's Network
European Women's Lobby

Women and men on the boards of the largest listed companies (2010)



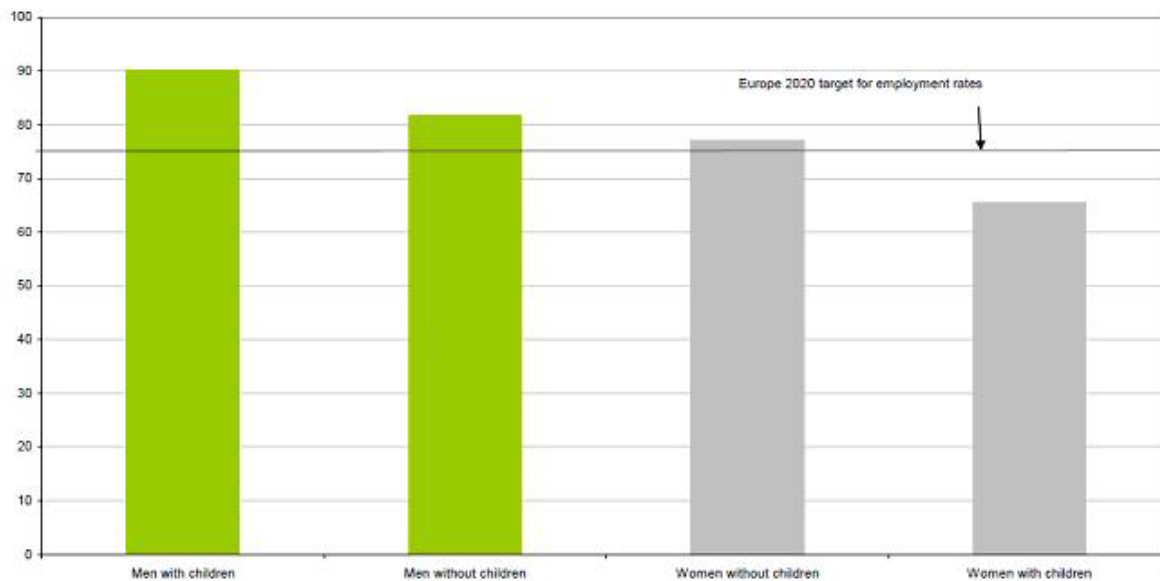
Source: European Commission, Database on women and men in decision-making.

Share of women and men in decision-making positions (2010)



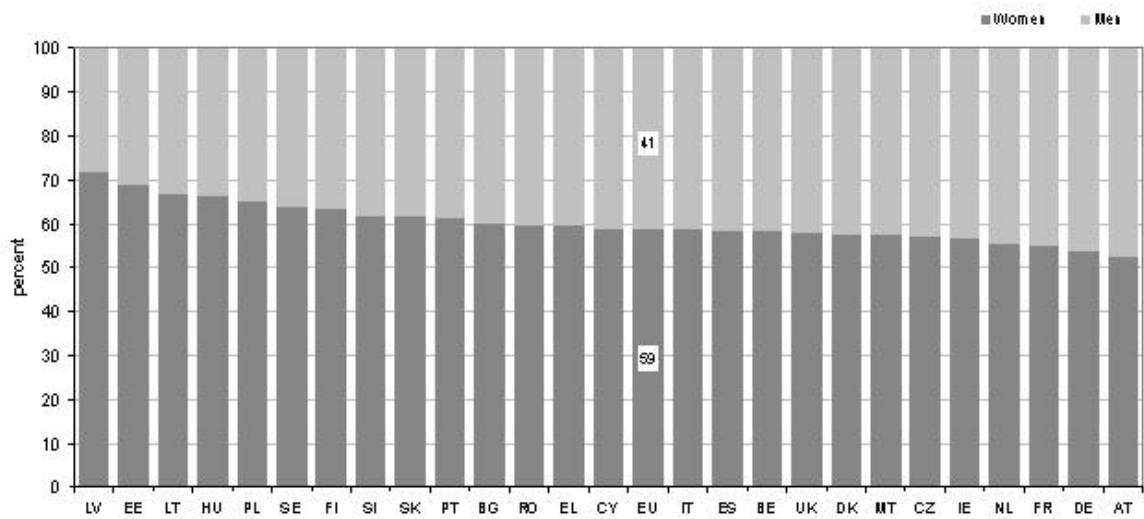
Source: Eurostat and European Commission's database on women and men in decision making
 NB: leaders of businesses covers ISCO (International Standard Classification of Occupations) categories 121 (Directors and chief executives) and 13 (Managers of small enterprises).

Employment rates of women and men (25-49) depending on whether they have children under 12 (EU 27, 2009)



Source : Eurostat, European Labour Force Survey, annual averages.
 Notes : No data available for SE.

Sex distribution of tertiary education graduates for EU (2009)



Source: Eurostat, Education statistics.

Note: LU: no data available. The EU-27 value is calculated on the basis of all countries except LU.