

## **PDG Fayette DABBOUSSI « Old & Young can make a powerfull combination & gender equality in Mediterranean economy”**

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Mr Chairperson

Follow lions,

Ladies & gentlemen,

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It's a great privilege to be addressing you today, about Economy in the Mediterranean countries north and south, in general, and specifically about the economical role of Women in the region.

Under imperial Rome, the roads in cold, wet Britannia were no straighter than those in sweltering North Africa. Across the southern Mediterranean and northern Europe alike, Latin was the lingua franca -1,500 years before anyone had coined the term. Under the Treaty of Rome, however, the European Union has behaved as if the Med were a frontier, rather than an organizing principle. As often as not, it has turned its back on the crescent that stretches from Morocco to Turkey, as a cradle of instability and terrorism. Sometimes the southern Med's main export has seemed to be boatloads of illegal immigrants.

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The weekend of 10 July, 2008, at a summit in Paris France's president, Nicolas Sarkozy, wanted to heal the rift. Some 40 heads of state and government from the EU and the southern and eastern Mediterranean met to create a new club, called the Union for the Mediterranean. Despite Mr. Sarkozy's bombast, Club Med had a modest start: the French proposed a secretariat, which they will jointly head with Egypt, and money to help finance ventures on solar energy, anti-terrorism and the inevitable cultural exchanges.

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Beyond the platitudes and projects lies the germ of a brilliant idea. Something is stirring around the Med as globalization takes root. Growth and investment have leapt. There is a new openness to trade and foreign money. The members of Club Med no longer need to glower across the table at each other. Instead, there is the prospect of the youth and vigor of the southern Mediterranean combining with a rich, ageing north. Despite the recent surge, the southern Med still takes less than 10% of all the FDI from the EU. This offers a tantalizing prospect.

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### **Mare nostrums**

The first step for the new union to thrive is to accept that it is for everyone's benefit, and let business do its work.

This means a free-trade area that opens the EU to goods and services from the south.

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The second step is for EU to use its patronage to boost spending on infrastructure, promote trade in the region and clean up politics. One lesson from Eastern Europe is that, with incentives, countries will start to sort themselves out.

For the Mediterranean, those incentives should include access to funds and markets. The logic of enlargement is that it could even include the faint possibility of membership of the EU itself (if the union were to admit non-Europeans). But none of that will count for much unless the southern Med chooses prosperity.

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The world sometimes writes off Europe as the old continent, well past the vigor of youth and doomed to gentle decline; at the same time it condemns many of the teeming economies of the southern Med as chaotic backwaters. Old and young can make a powerful combination. The creation of the Union for the Mediterranean is hardly the rebirth of imperial Rome, but it may just be the start of something exciting.

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### **We come here ladies and gentlemen to the role of women in Mediterranean Economy.**

The position of women in the Mediterranean labour market has changed significantly, due to their entry into the workforce in the large numbers in recent years. Despite this, there is still substantial segregation and inequality between the sexes. Men continue to work more hours in paid employment, and more men than women have paying jobs. Women are more likely to work part time and men unpaid domestic work is accounted for, the picture changes dramatically: research shows that a woman working part time works more hours in total than a man working full time.

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Women are continuing to drive employment growth in Europe, but remain disadvantaged on the labour market in relation to men, says a report adopted by the European Commission on 23 January 2008.

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The ongoing challenges like the \*pay gap,\* labour market segregation and \*work/life balance mean we still have some way to go to those jobs 'better' jobs too.

Overall, despite their better educational attainment, women's careers are shorter, slower and less well-paid: it is clear that we need to do more to make full use of the productive potential of the workforce.

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The Commission report highlights that the quantitative progress of women on the labour market has not yet been matched in qualitative terms. \*On the one hand, more than 7.5 out of the 12 million new jobs created in the EU since 2000 have been taken by women. \*Their employment rate now stands at 57.2%, or 3.5 points above its 2000 level, compared with a less than one point rise in the rate of male employment over the same period. \* Similarly, the rise in the rate of employment of women over the age of 55 has been significantly faster than that of men, and now stands at 34.8%, i.e. a 7.4 points increase on 2000.

On the other hand, several aspects of the quality of women's work remain problematic. Despite the fact that women represent 59% of university graduates and have a better educational attainment, their employment rate remains lower than men's (by 14.4 points) and they continue to earn on average 15% less than men for every hour worked.

Women also face greater difficulties in reaching decision-making positions. The presence of female managers in companies is progressing very slowly and stands at only 33%. Work/life balance is one area where major differences persist between women and men. The employment rate of women with young children is only 62.4%, compared with men (77.7%) underlining the imbalance between men and women in the use of time.

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### **Gender equality**

Equality between women and men is a fundamental right, a common value of the EU, and a necessary condition for the achievement of the EU objectives of growth, employment and social cohesion. Although inequalities still exist, the EU has made significant progress over the last decades in achieving equality between women and men. This is mainly thanks to equal treatment legislation, gender mainstreaming and specific measures for the advancement of women.

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The European Union launched an ambitious program (January 28<sup>th</sup>) to boost gender equality on the southern shore of the Mediterranean. The announcement was made during an EU delegation's visit to Tunis.

\*Officials said the program will benefit nine Mediterranean countries: Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, the Palestinian Territories, Israel Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon and Syria. It will be funded by the EU and implemented by the Tunis-based Centre of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTR), in co-operation with Belgium's Transtec, which will provide consultancy and technical support in the fields of social, economic and commercial development, and support of the private sector and democracy.

Despite significant strides made in education among young women in the Southern Mediterranean region, Women's employment and entrepreneurship trends, leave much to be desired.

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Key constraints facing women's economic participation in the South Mediterranean region are emphasized. The proposed Five Key Areas for Policy Advocacy are:

1. Women's rights and gender equality
2. the challenges of paid work and access to resources
3. Social security and protection
4. Formalization of entitlements and ownership rights
5. Economic growth and trade liberalization in area of globalization

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## **Finally**

I would like to include this notice about Lebanese economy

\* An International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission visited Beirut February 19 – March 5, 2009, to conduct annual discussions on economic and financial policies, and to review performance under the economic program supported by Emergency Post-Conflict Assistance (EPCA). The Lebanese economy has so far shown remarkable resilience in the face of the unfolding global financial crisis. The domestic financial system has had virtually no direct exposure to distressed financial products or markets and remains very liquid and amply capitalized, while economic growth has remained strong. Despite large fiscal and external vulnerabilities related to the size of the public debt and the government financing requirement, prudent macroeconomic and financial policies in recent years have strengthened the economy's ability to weather external shocks. Primary fiscal surpluses have contributed to lowering the debt-to-GDP ratio by nearly 20 percentage points since 2006; interest rate policy has supported deposit inflows, rapid de-dollarization and a build-up of international reserves; a strict financial regulation and oversight, have shielded banks from exposure to troubled international banks, structured products and wholesale financial markets.

### **In conclusion:**

The Lebanese economy is one of the safest in the world in these troubled days  
You are all urged to invest in our country.

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Thank you & good luck in our Mediterranean Conference