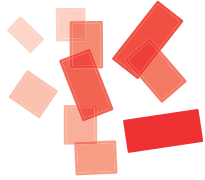






**PROGRESSIVE  
YEARBOOK 2020**





**BIG ISSUES**

# Gender equality: What is the legacy of the last EU mandate and what should we aim for in the year of the Beijing+25 jubilee?

Agnès Hubert

*The new European Parliament and European Commission register the largest presence of women ever. The European Commission and the European Central Bank will for the first time be led by a woman. These are good premises. Yet, the legacy of the previous European institutions is a not a bright one. Despite its commitments, the Juncker Commission has largely ignored the gender dimension and, in general, the European Union movement towards gender equality has been a slow one, as the labour-market participation of women remains much lower than that of men, while the gender pay gap is still too high, not to mention the backlash that the fight for gender equality is experiencing in some member states. Against this backdrop it is arguable whether we can still depict European gender equality policy as a success story. A crucial step forward would be the embedding of gender policies into European policies.*

*Europeans feel strongly about promoting gender equality: three quarters of respondents to a recent Eurobarometer survey (76%) think that tackling inequality between men and women should be a European Union priority.*

*Around nine in ten (91%) agree that tackling inequality between men and women is necessary for creating a fairer society.*

The final year of the Juncker Commission, 2019, saw high notes for gender equality: on 15 July, the President-to-be of the European Commission speaking in front of an almost paritarian newly elected assembly mentioned the founding fathers *and* mothers of Europe. Ursula von der Leyen insisted on having a gender-equal group of commissioners and recognised that equal pay is long overdue and that violence against women is a crime that requires a proactive European response.

In fact, the only President of the Commission to have mentioned gender equality in his inaugural speech before this was Jacques Santer in 1995, after a stormy session with Anita Gradin, the first Swedish commissioner.

Considering the increasing role of language in a Europe in search of the *affectio societatis* of its citizens, this is a significant symbolic move towards recognising women as agents in the European Union. Beyond this symbolic first move, confirmed by the appointment of a commissioner dedicated to equality, what are the opportunities to progress with a feminist agenda in 2020, the first year of the new decade?

For those who have always claimed that political will and having women in power is the number one condition for real progress, we could expect a period of radical change, of 'integrating gender' which feminists have been calling for decades.<sup>1</sup> With even more ambition, we could imagine being at a turning point where the value of equality in the Treaties will be used to introduce change towards new forms of economy and society.<sup>2</sup>

While these first positive signals rightfully fill us with expectations, the European Union is a very large vessel and change of course takes place in slow motion where path-dependency takes its toll. So the first step to predicting what could/should happen in 2020 is to know where we stand today. Where have the last five years left us as progressive achievements which can be built on, and what are the failures or missed opportunities from which to draw lessons?

## A poor start

Five years ago, when the Juncker Commission took up office, the economic and political context was, to say the least, 'ambiguous'. The damage caused to the social situation of women and disadvantaged groups by the economic and financial crisis persisted, especially in eastern countries and where austerity measures were introduced.<sup>3</sup> This left scars which, as we will see later, right-wing regimes took advantage of.<sup>4</sup> It also increased inequalities between women.

The new Commission also started off on the wrong foot, with a blind implementation of rules: the 'better regulation' agenda agreed under the Barroso Commission hit gender equality first as one of the first texts to be taken away from the 2015 legislative agenda (along with the climate change strategy). It became a 'strategic engagement' accountable only to the services

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- 1 Hoskins, C. (1996), *Integrating Gender*, London, Verso: 6.
  - 2 Masselot, A. (2019), "How to improve the interaction between legal instruments (EU acquis) and policymaking (communication, funding programme, European semester)", in N. Crowley and S. Sansonetti (eds), *New Visions for Gender Equality 2019*, Brussels: European Commission. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/saage\\_report-new\\_visions\\_for\\_gender\\_equality-2019.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/saage_report-new_visions_for_gender_equality-2019.pdf).
  - 3 "Despite a moderate recovery, part-time employment has increased and women remain underrepresented in the labour market ... and they take the bulk of unpaid work", in European Commission (2016), *Report on equality between women and men 2015*, Brussels. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/aid\\_development\\_cooperation\\_fundamental\\_rights/annual\\_report\\_ge\\_2015\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/aid_development_cooperation_fundamental_rights/annual_report_ge_2015_en.pdf).
  - 4 Zarachenko E. (2019), "The neo-liberal fuel to the anti-gender movement", *International Politics and Society*. Available at: <https://www.ips-journal.eu/regions/europe/article/show/the-neoliberal-fuel-to-the-anti-gender-movement-3747/>.

of the Commission rather than an official communication endorsed by the college, scrutinised by the European Parliament and approved by the Council. This was seen as a move to put gender equality on the back burner when the most important priority of the new Commission was to relaunch the economy (that economy that was precisely so detrimental to women) by attracting investments with the Juncker plan. This major endeavour, which mobilised the college and human and financial resources of the EU on a grand scale (and, finally, claimed to be the major success of the last five years), used public EU money to guarantee loans to start-ups and small- and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) as well as infrastructure projects in a gender-blind way. The Investment Plan for Europe did not integrate the fact that 'access to finance' is a very different thing for a man or a woman.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the 'social' commitment of Jean Claude Juncker (let's remember his social triple A Europe and announcements of 'social stress tests'), the Juncker fund, or Investment Plan for Europe is 'gender blind': no impact assessments took into account the impact of these investments on the creation of equality or inequalities between women and men, leaving the great majority of funds to find their way into the hands of men.

The decade did not start on a high note for gender equality. When the Juncker Commission took office, economic and social indicators were still in the red, inequalities were widening and populist regimes were flourishing.

Still, except for the European pillar of social rights, all the major projects of the Juncker Commission ignored the gender dimension. This was blatantly the case for another major initiative of the Commission: the scenarios for the future of Europe which, according to Petra Ahrens and Anna van der Vleuten, reduced equality in these scenarios to the harmonisation of the quantity of fish in fish fingers and EU-wide access to vaccination against measles.<sup>6</sup>

From the double approach (gender mainstreaming plus specific action) which had been the hallmark of EU gender equality policy since the end of the last century, only specific actions were actively pursued. They concentrated mainly on fights to increase the number of women on boards, accession to the Istanbul Convention and on a revision of the maternity directive.

**Despite the 'social' commitment of Jean Claude Juncker, the Investment Plan for Europe is 'gender blind'**

## **Gender equality policy 2015–2020: Incremental changes and hot potatoes (tough nuts)**

According to the Gender Equality Index published in 2019 by the European Institute for Gender Equality, "the European Union has continued to move towards gender equality at a snail's pace". With a Gender Equality Index score of 67.4 out of 100, the EU is still far from fulfilling its promise. Improvements are slow. Since 2005, the EU's score has increased by only 5.4

5 <https://www.oecd.org/gender/data/do-women-have-equal-access-to-finance-for-their-business.htm>.

6 Ahrens, P. and A. van der Vleuten, "Fishfingers and Measles? Assessing complex gender equality in the scenarios for the future of Europe", *Journal of Common Market Studies*.



states and on the sustainable development goals agenda for 2030<sup>10</sup> as well as two punctual initiatives for mainstreaming gender equality in the digital<sup>11</sup> and transport<sup>12</sup> sectors.

## Winds of change and disrupters

The institutional legacy of the last EU mandate on gender equality took place in a specific context where factors linked to the policy had a positive and/or negative impact on progress. They will definitely have an influence on the first year of the new mandate. We will look in particular into: 1. the resistance to gender equality and the possible 'backlash'; 2. the advances towards parity democracy; 3. the effects of the #metoo movement; 4. the sustainable development goals and the Beijing+25 anniversary. We take it for granted that attention to these factors is necessary to making a success of the coming period.

### *Turbulent times: Backlash?*

In November 2017 the annual colloquium of the European Commission on Fundamental Rights focused on Women's rights in turbulent times, indicating the concern of EU decision-makers regarding the spread of anti-gender ideas and nationalist backlash against women's rights, both of which threaten the principles and commitments embedded in the Treaties.

This colloquium drew on findings laid down in three documents: a special Eurobarometer survey, conducted in 2017;<sup>13</sup> the EU gender equality index, showing that gender equality has been advancing "at a snail pace in all the member states";<sup>14</sup> and a study compiled by the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA),<sup>15</sup> underlining the persistence of gender discrimination and gender-based violence, experienced mostly by women and girls, across the EU. All three documents suggest that the EU and its member states have not done enough to safeguard the dignity and rights of women and girls, much less to advance gender equality, in general, "severely limiting their ability to enjoy their rights and to participate on an equal footing in society".

Backlash? Only the FRA report used this term explicitly, but for many policy makers, this event marked a clear realisation that – far from following the linear progression that one could

**The EU gender equality index shows that gender equality has been advancing at a snail pace in all the member states**

10 European Commission (2019), Reflection Paper "Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030". Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/rp\\_sustainable\\_europe\\_30-01\\_en\\_web.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/rp_sustainable_europe_30-01_en_web.pdf).

11 <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/eu-countries-commit-boost-participation-women-digital>.

12 [https://ec.europa.eu/transport/themes/social/women-transport-eu-platform-change\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/transport/themes/social/women-transport-eu-platform-change_en).

13 Special Eurobarometer on gender equality 2017. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2154>.

14 EIGE Gender Equality Index 2017. Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2017-measuring-gender-equality-european-union-2005-2015-report>.

15 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2017), Challenges to women's human rights in the EU. Available at: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2017-challenges-to-women-human-rights\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2017-challenges-to-women-human-rights_en.pdf).



have imagined some 15 to 20 years ago – one of the EU's biggest policy success stories, gender equality, is being progressively undermined and deconstructed.

The threat to women's advancement represented by the rise of political intolerance, neo-liberalism, neo-nationalist movements and politicians who praise 'traditional family values' all over Europe is real. This translates into an assault on the real lives of women: many feminists are verbally assaulted online on a daily basis, some even receiving death threats.<sup>16</sup> In one of the perversions of the #metoo facts, a prominent woman in France claimed that "rape can be pleasurable" and that sexual harassment is not an offence... and it was published! This cultural backlash advocates the return of a natural gender order in which so-called traditional family values were imposed by representatives of the state, backed by churches, courts, and other institutions.

This rising intolerance is a source of concern to a majority of democratically minded people everywhere, and rightly so. Having declared gender equality a fundamental principle, the EU not only has a legitimate right to fight it: it also has a moral responsibility to do so.

This new context is not simply cultural: it is political, it is economic and 'manmade'. Researchers analyse the 'backsliding' of gender equality and the impact of neo-liberal policies.<sup>17</sup> Recently, a report commissioned by the European Parliament's Commission on Women's Rights and Gender Equality tracked the regressive strategies adopted by governments in six countries: Austria, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.<sup>18</sup> Despite great variations in both the intensity of the backlash in individual states and the nature of the policies that have been implemented, a few frequently adopted measures stand out. These include: restricting the space for egalitarian civil society mobilisations; defunding or otherwise marginalising gender equality institutions; redefining institutions and policies from a focus on women (or gender) to a focus on 'the family'; and tacitly or overtly supporting a campaign that constructs and elevates 'the theory of gender' (also referred to as 'gender ideology') into a *casus belli*.<sup>19</sup> Other recurrent features include support for 'men's rights' movements, and critiquing, including by declining to ratify or threatening to withdraw from, the Istanbul Convention on addressing violence against women and domestic violence.

These political positions stand and get their proponents elected in the absence of policies to promote women's decent employment, the lack of affordable childcare, a minority of women in decision-making positions and unpunished violence against women. They exploit the absence of policies for gender equality which the new Commission could address with a wide-ranging use of targeted instruments within the framework of the structural funds.

This said, gender equality is a fundamental value of the EU according to article 2 of the

16 Verloo, M. (ed) (2018), *Variety of Opposition to Gender Equality in Europe*, New York: Routledge.

17 Zarachenko, "The neo-liberal fuel to the anti-gender movement"; Grzebalka W. and E. Kovacs (2018), "Beyond the anti-women backlash", *International Politics and Society*. Available at: <https://www.ips-journal.eu/regions/europe/article/show/beyond-the-anti-women-backlash-3160/>.

18 Juhász, B. and E. PAP (2018), *Backlash in Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Rights*, Brussels: European Parliament.

19 Grzebalska W., A. Petó and E. Kovatz (2017), "Gender as a Symbolic Glue. How Gender Became an Umbrella Term for the Rejection of the (Neo)liberal Order", *Political Critique*. Available at: <http://politicalcritique.org/long-read/2017/gender-as-symbolic-glue-how-gender-became-an-umbrella-term-for-the-rejection-of-the-neoliberal-order/#>.

Treaty on the European Union and, in case of proven violation of the rights of women, article 7 could be invoked. This threat, which could take the form of sanctions, while not desirable, exist and could be used.

### ***Parity democracy: Not only numbers matter***

Women members make up 40.4% of the European Parliament, 12 out of 27 commissioners are female including the President – this cannot but make a difference to achieving a balanced set of high-level decision-makers. Equally important is the leadership of the European Central Bank by a woman.

This said, it seems important to recall at this stage that change for a more balanced use of power will not happen only with numbers. The concept of parity democracy, which was developed at the end of the last century, aims to acknowledge the equal value of women and men, their equal dignity and their obligation to share rights and responsibilities, free from prejudices and gender stereotyping. This creates a radically new approach to gender equality policies, where the correction of past discriminations is complemented by the fundamental right to equality, which becomes a legal requirement. Eliane Vogel Polsky, the Belgian lawyer who championed the concept, explained parity democracy in the following way:

“The construction of the right to equality as it has been developed so far is difficult to implement because it is subject to legal systems created without women. If parity representation is recognized to be a necessary condition of democracy rather than a remote consequence, then the rules of the game and social norms will have to change. This could radically transform society and allow for real gender equal relations”.

As we are nearing parity in numbers, decision-makers should remember not to take for granted rules and norms as they are but to reassess systematically their fitness for the needs of women and men alike.

### ***‘Me too’***

This expression, first used by grass-roots activist and victim of sexual assault Tarana Burke in 2006 to create solidarity and help sexual assault survivors, became viral with a # on social media following the exposure of the widespread sexual-abuse allegations against Harvey Weinstein in early October 2017. Social media rapidly spread the movement across the world, inciting women of all backgrounds to share their stories of sexual harassment. Beyond the headlines, data show the far-reaching impacts of the #metoo movement. Hundreds of women and men have filed harassment complaints, called hotlines and come forward with their own #metoo stories.

For EU policy-making, the visibility of the movement has had clear and implicit impacts: the European Ombudsman, for instance, drafted a list of good practices based on a review of the anti-harassment policies in 26 EU institutions and agencies ranging from awareness-raising, workplace risk assessment and regular policy-monitoring to mandatory training, swift procedures and rehabilitation measures.<sup>20</sup> Also the extensive media coverage of sexual harassment and its

20 “EU Ombudsman creates ‘good practices’ list to combat harassment”, *The Parliament Magazine*, 2 Janu-

**The #metoo movement did not take the same form or make the same claims in all member states but many governments were compelled to address the issue**

consequences brought gender inequalities out of the dark and gave more legitimacy to debates on the Istanbul Convention and the use or development of EU legal instruments to fight sexual harassment. It also empowered women across the globe to speak out against what would earlier have been seen as their unfortunate fate. Many more women and men started to embrace a 'feminist' vision, while criticism and backlash contributed to a very welcome politicisation of the issue. As addressed in our recently published FEPS pamphlet looking at social media data, the movement did not take the same form or make the same claims in all member states but many governments were compelled to address the issue and discussions about EU protection against gender-based violence reached the kitchen sink.<sup>21</sup>

Never before had an opportunity to visibly develop Europe-wide policies that contribute to protect citizens arisen in such a favourable context. This should be seized upon to advance with the Istanbul Convention, but also to use the binding power of the European Court of Justice and propose a directive.

***The year of Beijing+25***

One of the EU major contribution to the 1995 Beijing UN Conference on Women, Peace and Development was the insistence on gender mainstreaming. At the end of each of the 12 critical areas of the Platform for Action, the EU insisted on a paragraph stating that the parties to the conference should, in all their actions, ensure that they were conceived to "promote equality and eliminate discriminations".

As we are reaching the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, this is, for the EU, the main message to carry: how the integration of a gender perspective has been developed into EU (and member state) policies, with what tools, what effect and how it can be improved.

In line with the concept of parity democracy which can only be effective if the rules of the game and the norms are fit for women and men (health check), the concept of gender mainstreaming, which has the potential to be a game changer, will be effective if no policy, action or programme is left unconsidered, be it in education, energy, transport, the economy... you name it.

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ary 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/news/eu-ombudsman-creates-good-practices-list-combat-harassment>

21 Corsi, M., L. Thissen and G. Zacchia (eds) (2019), *The #MeToo Social Media Effect and Its Potentials for Social Change in Europe*, Brussels, FEPS. Available at: [https://www.feps-europe.eu/attachments/publications/metoo\\_web\\_s.pdf](https://www.feps-europe.eu/attachments/publications/metoo_web_s.pdf).

## Time for a reset

The rather meagre progress accomplished in the last five years by the yardstick of the potential at stake (gender equality as a transformation factor) confirms an intuition which I have carried for a long time: we cannot continue to present the European gender equality policy as a success story when the main narrative is always hampered by failures to convince the member states or the second-rate status of gender equality when it comes to attracting investments or balancing national budgets.

I nurtured this intuition when working on the Beyond GDP agenda following an inspiring Commission conference in 2007 and the Stiglitz, Sen, Fitoussi Commission on the measurement of economic performance and social progress of 2008/9.

Then, in the few years following the 2008 financial crisis, I was comforted by the fact that a number of academics and politicians were seriously arguing for a radical change in the economy. The neo-liberal model had lived and proven its inadequacy in terms of redistribution<sup>22</sup> and creation of welfare. Economists were developing alternative models putting forward the need to create well-being rather than blind economic growth, arguing for caring and for the 'real' economy rather than the growth of financial markets, for respect rather than exploitation of people and the environment. Sylvia Walby even attempted a feminist interpretation of the crisis.<sup>23</sup> "If the Lehman brothers had been Lehman sisters!" For a short while even an essentialist discourse pleaded for having less testosterone and no longer a culture of permanent competition, expecting women to be systematically caring and cooperative.

Unfortunately, it did not last long before the unchanged pursuit of growth and jobs came back to the forefront of the EU agenda. The teachings of the crisis were in the end rather thin and in particular it did not seem to affect the perception or situation of women or the emergence of new governance methods.

In the context described before, gender inequalities are a threat to democracy, and of what can be seen as positive factors for change. I was particularly comforted very recently by the content of the report *New Visions for Gender Equality 2019*<sup>24</sup> as part of the preparation for the new European strategy for gender equality revealed in March 2019.<sup>25</sup>

By scrutinising existing research, measures, policies and trends in relation to the gender equality commitments of the Treaties, the authors pave the way for logical but radical changes. Masselot's plea for using gender mainstreaming to advance a value-based economy, is particularly convincing. She argues that despite the strong Treaties commitments to gender equality and gender mainstreaming, economic issues in particular are treated as gender neutral, ignoring that "Gender dynamics are part and parcel of any society and as such, they are at the heart of European integration".<sup>26</sup> The recognition that "gender equality and the economy are

22 Piketty, T (2014), *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, Harvard University Press.

23 Walby, S. (2012), *Crisis, Polity*.

24 N. Crowley and S. Sansonetti (eds), *New Visions for Gender Equality 2019*, Brussels: European Commission.

25 <https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/initiatives/ares-2020-267703>.

26 Kantola, J. and E. Lombardo (eds) (2017), *Gender and the Economic Crisis in Europe: Politics, Institutions and Intersectionality*, Springer.

strongly interconnected in a mutually constitutive relationship" would be in line with promises of the Treaty. "Yet the 'EU's economic/social binary places women's interests outside this sphere",<sup>27</sup> entrenching gender equality concerns as political rather than economic.<sup>28</sup>

This exclusion (or lack of implementation) of the gender mainstreaming commitment bears many consequences. For instance, as the economic model, which the EU subscribes to, does not incorporate the values it has proclaimed in the Treaty.<sup>29</sup> Such an economic model considers these values to be too costly, as it was well illustrated when the proposed amendments to the Pregnant Workers Directive (COM(2008) 637) were rejected by the Council in December, withdrawn by the Commission in June 2015, because they were deemed too costly.<sup>30</sup>

The European semester is another example of this phenomenon as it subordinates social aims to fiscal and macroeconomic imperatives and prioritises economics-oriented policy.<sup>31</sup>

"Even when social policy is increasingly incorporated into the European semester,<sup>32</sup> some recommendations have much stronger legal standing than others. Recommendations connected to the Stability and Growth Pact have a Treaty basis, while social policy recommendations often do not. This means that any conflict between recommendations is biased towards the economic recommendations. The asymmetry in the legal standing of the different recommendations from the European Semester, according to whether they are economic or social, is harmful to the achievement of gender equality."

Moreover, the state of the knowledge of EU economic experts contributes to the practical segmentation between economic and gender equality issues. Such knowledge is, overall, homogeneous and reflects little understanding of feminist economics.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, European integration has developed on the basis of a common economic space<sup>34</sup> constructed through the pursuit of gender-blind and gender-biased economic goals promoted by the EU.<sup>35</sup>

27 Cavaghan, R. and M. O'Dwyer (2018), "European economic governance in 2017: A recovery for whom?", *JCMS, Journal of Common Market Studies* 56(1): 96–108.

28 Kronsell, A. (2005), "Gender, power and European integration theory", *Journal of European Public Policy* 12(6): 1022–40.

29 Power, M. (2004), "Social provisioning as a starting point for feminist economics", *Feminist Economics* 10(3): 3–19.

30 Foubert, P. and Š. Imamović (2015), "The Pregnant Workers Directive: Must Do Better – Lessons to be Learned from Strasbourg?" *Journal of Social Welfare & Family Law* 37(3): 309–320.

31 Copeland, P. and M. Daly (2018), "The European Semester and EU social policy", *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 56(5): 1001–1018; Hubert, A. and B. Helfferich (2016), "Integrating gender into EU economic governance: oxymoron or opportunity?", FES Discussion Paper, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bruessel/13256.pdf>

32 From the 2019 Report on equality between women and men, page 8: "in the 2018 European Semester, eight member states received a country-specific recommendation under the European Semester framework linked to women's labour market participation (Austria, Czechia, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Italy, Poland, and Slovakia). The recommendations covered issues such as improving the labour market participation of women, addressing the high gender pay gap, ensuring the availability, affordability and/or quality of (full-time) formal childcare services and reducing tax-benefit disincentives for second earners".

33 Elson, D. (2002), "Macroeconomics and macroeconomic policy from a gender perspective", in *Public Hearing of Study Commission on Globalisation of the World Economy – Challenges and Responses*, Deutscher Bundestag: 1–18.

34 Hoskyns, C. (2008), "Governing the EU: Gender and macroeconomics", in *Global Governance*, Palgrave Macmillan: 107–128.

35 Cavaghan, R. and M. O'Dwyer (2018), "European economic governance in 2017: A recovery for whom?",

And the authors of the above-mentioned *New vision for gender equality 2019* conclude: “If gender mainstreaming is to drive a value-based economy, it should evolve in a way that: includes enhanced knowledge relating to the interdependence between gender equality and the economy; substantially reduces male dominance in key decision-making positions; and embraces an intersectional approach”.

## Conclusion

Expectations are high in this first year of a new decade when for the first time in history a woman presides the Commission, for the first time in history a Commissioner is in charge of equality, and the number of female MEPs is at its highest ever. Expectations are high not only in the EU, but also outside. The Beijing+25 celebrations in June this year will be an opportunity to show the world that gender equality is a value that counts in Europe and is worth fighting for.

There are expectations for a strong specific gender equality policy, framed by a binding gender strategy which will commit the EU institutions and the member states. It will be presented in March. It will certainly address the pay gap with more than cosmetic measures, it will have to avail resources to finance work–life balance measures and it will have to promise legislation and resources to eradicate gender-based violence. Beyond specific measures however, it is the effectiveness of mainstreaming gender equality into policies which will be the test case of the new programme. Properly implemented, gender mainstreaming has the potential to shift the way we measure the economy and to implement a value-based economy, where the value of gender equality could guide the EU economy rather than the other way around. A value-based economy requires gender mainstreaming to include gender budgeting more effectively. If the economy is understood as a basic human need, then gender equality, childcare and education do not necessarily represent costs, rather investments likely to result in long-term economic growth.

Next June at the Beijing+25 event, the EU will have the opportunity to show a turbulent world that values count.

**It is the effectiveness of mainstreaming gender equality into policies which will be the test case of the new Commission’s programme**