



Beirut, 6 April 2017

## Press release

### National Roundtable

#### From Ministerial Conclusions to gender equality policy making in the Euro-Med region 6th of April 2016 at hotel Riviera

The national roundtable “*From Ministerial Conclusions to gender equality policy making in the Euro-Med region*”, under the patronage of the Minister of State for Women’s Affairs H.E. Jean Ogasapian, and with the support of the European Union, took place on 6<sup>th</sup> of April 2016 at hotel Riviera. It was organised by the Lebanese Women’s Democratic Gathering and Association Najdeh in partnership with the Euromed Feminist Initiative. The one-day event gathered representatives from civil society and stakeholders and discussed the policy recommendations for improving the status of gender equality, that have been developed during one year in the frame of the project “*Gender Regional Platform*” funded by the European Union. This national dialogue was part of the process to prepare for the 4th UfM Ministerial Meeting on women’s rights, scheduled to take place in Egypt in the fall this year.

H.E. Jean Ogasapian, Minister of State for Women’s Affairs, opened the event reminding the constraints of the regional context that have imposed new restrictions and suffering for women. However, he stressed that women continue to struggle for their rights and emphasized the importance of this roundtable in this regard. He expressed his expectation that this dialogue would contribute to the process of transforming the recommendations into practical measures, which is the next step. Mr. Ogasapian insisted that the priority is to take “Concrete steps towards ending violence against women and enhancing women’s political participation.”

Ms. Julia Koch - Head of Political Section EU Delegation Lebanon, underlined the commitment of the European Union to women’s participation gender equality: “We are now approaching parliamentary elections and I sincerely hope that women will not only vote in large numbers, but also be present as candidates in large numbers. It’s the time for women to claim their place! We, the European Union will stand ready to support them in these efforts.”

Mr. Samy Gemayel, Member of Parliament and a leader of the Lebanese Kataeb party, discussed the responsibility of the decision makers in annulling discriminative for women legislation, adopting legislation that criminalize violence against women. He emphasized that adopting gender quota is a needed step in order to enhance women’s participation in decision making.

Ms. Leila El Ali, Co-President Euromed Feminist Initiative reminded the milestones of the one-year process of developing the Gender Regional Platform and stressed on the important role of the women’s rights organisations in leading a dialogue with decision makers and having overall cooperation and coordination with all responsible parties in order to support the transformation of policies into action.

The speakers at first panel presented the Gender Regional Platform and the policy recommendations in the four identified priority areas:

- Ending discrimination against women and strengthening women’s participation;
- Reform education, changing gender stereotypes and attitudes towards gender equality;
- Ending violence against women, wars and occupation and
- Ensuring freedom and independent action of the civil society and support to women’s rights organizations

During the second session experts from relevant governmental institutions, civil society and political sphere discussed ways to turn these recommendations into concrete actions in order to improve women’s lives. It was seen as imperative to approach the recommendations in a comprehensive manner, without putting hierarchy among them, as radical improvements are needed in all the four areas. It was noted that discriminative social culture cannot be changed without annulling legal discrimination. Representatives from local municipalities underlined that women’s economic dependency and poverty are the major problems on local level. Domestic violence against women was seen as a major hindrance for women’s participation in the political sphere.



Therefore, it was emphasized that a cross- sectoral approach should be used while designing measures for enabling women's equal access to decision making, labor market and education, coupled with broader awareness raising on discrimination in law and in practice, in order to raise and widen social knowledge on women's rights.

Due to the need of multiple and multilayered interventions for the implementation of the recommendations it was proposed to dedicate this whole decade to women's rights, empowerment and gender equality, in order to keep pressure, momentum and accumulate political will, and make progress in achieving Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals. National and regional campaigning was recommended as one of the effective tools to achieve changes on the ground.

Furthermore, it was underlined that the decision makers should demonstrate stronger commitment to gender equality during the upcoming UfM Ministerial Conference in order to make the Ministerial Conclusions more concrete and policy oriented. The rate of change was assessed as slow and unsatisfactory, independently of the noted progress. Therefore, expectations were expressed that the 4<sup>th</sup> UfM Ministerial Conference on women's rights will speed up improvements in the above areas.