

Kick-off meeting

on 1st December 2010 in the Ministry of Labour and Social Security in Ankara

Speech of Karin Lukas¹ - Austrian Junior Partner Project Leader

Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the representative of the Austrian consortium partner, the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights, I am very pleased to be part of this important undertaking which we are starting today.

Gender equality is one of the most firmly embedded principles in international human rights law, but it is a difficult one to implement. A few decades ago, NGOs and the UN started a campaign called “Women’s Rights are Human Rights” to make the world aware that women’s rights are not just a side event and a formalism but a key issue in the mainstream, right in the heart of human rights. Today, gender equality is not anymore seen as the “icing on the cake”, some luxury issue that can be done away with in times of economic straits like the financial crisis today, but gender equality is the indispensable ingredient in a democratic society. This is undisputed in Europe. But – we haven’t achieved it yet. You may have been aware of the global gender gap report which came out recently. It aptly shows that worldwide quite some progress has been made but still a lot needs to be done. One key issue here is the balance of work and family life. The example of the Scandinavian countries shows us that the reconciliation of work and family for women and men is possible if the structures are established. Many countries struggle with this issue, Turkey and Austria among them. Of course, the implementation of gender equality has wide implications for the set-up of a society: It questions its social stereotypes, the already mentioned balance of family and work life, and in consequence, it rebuilds existing power relations. This may to some extent explain the gap between the rhetoric of gender equality and its realisation. Legislation has been one key instrument to narrow this gap. Turkey has taken one major step by recently establishing positive action in its Constitution. Austria has taken this step as well and since then much has been achieved to bring more qualified women into the institutions. Equally, the European Union has taken numerous legal steps to push its Member States to implement gender equality. In Austria this led to a number of amendments to the gender equality legislation. This project today has this as one objective: To align Turkish legislation with the EU

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gender equality acquis. I will not go here into the recent changes of the acquis such as in the area of self-employed women or pregnant workers and the changes to come on parental leave.

I will just say that we look forward to supporting our Turkish colleagues in this endeavour. The Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights has a lot experience in supporting legal change in candidate countries and new Member States.

This is the case not only in Turkey where we cooperate in 5 Twinning projects mostly with the Ministry of the Interior and the police but also in various other countries in the area of equal treatment and anti-discrimination such as Poland and Croatia. What we learned in these projects so far is that the combination of political will and engaged, courageous persons in the implementation of the project are vital ingredients. NGOs which support the project objectives during and after the end of the project are very important as well. This project is only one, but an important step of Turkey on the way to gender equality according to EU standards. Some changes will take longer; some will be achieved within the duration of this project. I am convinced that this consortium of Turkish, German and Austrian institutions is very motivated and ambitious to achieve the utmost possible in this project. As a small token of this motivation, let me tell you that I come directly from my vacation to be here and on my birthday as well. We, the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights with our experts will do what we can to contribute to this project. The first project component on the EU acquis has already started and is well under way. I am looking forward to the coming months and wish this project the utmost success. Thank you very much - Teşekkür ederim.