

PRESS RELEASE

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Spring Council and Women's Day both on 8 March: opportunity for (mostly male) Summit to show lead

This year, the European Spring Council incidentally coincides with Women's Day. An opportunity for Heads of Government to remember that competitiveness, growth and jobs cannot be achieved without a full inclusion of women in Europe's economic life.

In this regard, EUROCHAMBRES Women Network (EWN) calls on decision-makers not to leave behind the female business agenda – and thus over half of the European population – and to move to action regarding the European pact for gender equality they signed on the occasion of the Spring Council 2006.

Despite significant progress that has been made over the last five years regarding the employment situation of women¹, Member States should not rest on their achievements. Special attention needs to be given to the development of female entrepreneurship in the overall "entrepreneurship creation" context². Also, more remains to be done in the field of reconciling professional and family life.

Sophia Economacos, EWN's President, said: *"The fact that female employment rates have gone up should not make us forget that it is still difficult for women to reconcile private and professional life. Indeed, those directly affected by caring tasks – be it for children or other dependent persons – are women by a significant majority. To a large extent, this has to do with traditional mindsets according to which women have to care for the family while men pursue a professional career. For reconciliation policies to be successful, they need to tackle not only the questions of child or dependents' care, parental leave schemes and flexible working arrangements for both women and men, but also take care of changing mindsets, away from traditional ideas and stereotypes."*

Both the reconciliation question and the issue of female entrepreneurship are tackled by "On Board", the new project of EUROCHAMBRES Women Network.

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¹ The Commission's 2007 report on equality between women and men in the EU acknowledges that the female employment target of 60% by 2010 is likely to be met if the positive trend continues.

² While the numbers of female entrepreneurs in Europe have increased twice as fast as those of male entrepreneurs over the last six years, the overall share of female entrepreneurs remains low. According to the European Labour Force Survey, results for the 2nd quarter 2006 indicate that the share of men in the category 'employers and self-employed' exceeds 70%, while the share of women is just below 30%.