

Maria Damanaki

European Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

Female entrepreneurship

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

The European Network of Female Entrepreneurship
Ambassadors

Brussels, 8 December 2010

Dear Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Ambassadors,

First of all, I would like to apologise for Vice President Tajani who is unfortunately unable to be with us tonight. However, it is a great pleasure for me to be standing here, in this room, with you today. One of the great privileges of my job is to have the chance to meet people such as you – creative, innovative, entrepreneurial, and with a drive to change things.

I was very pleased to learn that 12 new countries and 120 ambassadors have – today - joined the European Network of Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors. Altogether, we now have 22 countries and 250 ambassadors!

Let me take this opportunity, to thank the Belgian Presidency for its strong support and for organising today's event together with the European Commission.

Allow me now, to say a few words about the philosophy behind the programme.

Europe needs more new firms and more innovation. There is a need to stimulate the entrepreneurial mindsets of young people and to create a more favourable societal climate for entrepreneurship. Sustainable growth based on innovation and excellence requires an increasing number of start-ups, which are likely to provide more and better jobs.

So, cultural aspects need also to be taken into account. In Europe, there is often certain reluctance in taking up opportunities for self-employment and entrepreneurial activities. According to the 2009 Eurobarometer, only 45% of European citizens would like to be self-employed. In the United States figures are different: 55% of the population would like to be their own boss, while only 36% believe that dependent employment is the best option.

Today and in the future, the ability to adapt, to get new ideas and to put these ideas into action, to be pro-active and to accept risks will be crucial. Europe cannot compete in the global economy on cost: we can only stay competitive by investing in our people and their capacity to innovate.

The 23 million small and medium sized businesses constitute more than 99% of our business community, create almost 60% of our wealth and provide around 70% of total employment.

Europe needs more female entrepreneurs. In this area it is clear that women remain under-represented and therefore under-employed. Today, female entrepreneurs constitute only 34.4% of the self-employed in EU25 (Eurostat) and only 20% in industry. Their share in start-ups is around 30%.

The unused entrepreneurial potential of women is a source of creativity, innovation and economic growth that can considerably contribute to our welfare and new jobs. We cannot afford to renounce to it.

Now, what is the Commission doing about this?

Every commissioner is engaged to this aim, through his or her dossier. In this context, as a Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, I am trying to support women in fisheries and make sure they find a supportive climate to start-up their own businesses. One way of doing this is to make sure that there is enough financial support available. Especially for women who want to set up their own business. The reformed Fisheries Fund will address this.

The European Commission adopted the Small Business Act. As the Commission aims in particular to generate a business environment that facilitates the creation and development of women-led companies, the Small Business Act provides for specific positive actions for this.

The European Network of Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors is one of these actions. Your hard work and commitment has already brought tangible results. We have received information from five countries taking part in the network which shows that 52 new women-led companies have been created. I would like to express my warm thanks for all your efforts!

Next year, the Commission will move on to work on supporting schemes for women who have already started up their business. A call for proposals to set up mentoring schemes will be published shortly.

We are currently also promoting entrepreneurship among women graduates. The idea is to provide courses for female graduates on business skills that will help them to consider a career as an entrepreneur in their chosen field of interest or study.

Of course, the Member States need to take action in this area as well. Therefore, the Commission has invited all Member States to provide mentoring and support for female entrepreneurs at national level as well as to exchange best practices on this area.

Let me conclude by stating that we definitely have to encourage more dynamic women who are able to create and expand competitive firms. We have to stress that becoming an entrepreneur is not only a way to earn one's living but also a way to self-realisation and self-fulfilment. It is a way to realise one's dream and be more flexible when it comes to reconciling private and business life.

We therefore need to continue to look for innovative and adequate solutions to the current obstacles. When it comes to businesswomen the circumstances and the environment should cater to their needs much more than they do today. Here, your help is needed. Your commitment to support the European Network of Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors is a significant contribution.

This is what you all do: you provide us with your energy and your service to help increase female entrepreneurship in Europe. Please continue doing so!

Thank you all very much for your enthusiasm and your support. I wish you great success and a rewarding time in your role!