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**A STUDY FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN OBSERVATORY
FOR THE RECONCILIATION OF FAMILY AND PROFESSIONAL
LIFE**

Nicosia 2008

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FOREWORD

It is known that gender remains a fundamental factor in occupational segregation between men and women and in characterising professions as "female" or "male" ones. The professions that even nowadays are considered to be suitable for women are those that ensure the possibility of performing the prevailing social role of the housewife-mother. The latter is a social expectation that is often culpatory and conflictive for women and compels them to part-time employment, abandoning any ambitions of professional evolution or even relinquishing work altogether for the sake of family and children's upbringing. According to European Union statistics women who resort to this solution comprise 33% of female labour resources, while the corresponding male percentage is just 6%.

Either way, though, men and women now coexist in the work place. The current socio-economic circumstances call for female employment and women's movements assert the elimination of predominant attitudes regarding the sexes and entrance into the labour market, their professional evolution on terms of equality and equal opportunities, a fact that nowadays is directly related to development, social coherence, but also the quality of democracy.

The improvement, however, of women's position, the encouragement of their participation in the labour market and employment in general, as well as the occupation with science, research and social issues in particular, entails a greater involvement of men in family obligations. It calls for a redistribution of domestic social roles, a redistribution of domestic time in favour of women as well, the acceptance of social motherhood and the

redefinition of the paternal role – in short, it calls for a family of democracy and equality. In order for the gap between the institutional framework and social reality to be bridged, at least in Cyprus, the social collective conscience has to accept that women's participation in the public sphere of life is as important as that of men and that it is their right, should they wish so, to transcend the boundaries of home and childcare. The state and social support of these choices is a sign of modernising the attitudes and beliefs of a society and its members and improves the quality of labour.

A significant factor, however, in defining the quality of labour is the existence of regulations and practices for the facilitation of reconciliation/harmonisation of family and professional life of working people, men and women as well. Such regulations should acknowledge that the participation in family care is an equal responsibility of both men and women and serve men and women to the same degree. It must be understood that a balanced participation of men and women in the labour market as well as the family life is an essential element in the development of the society and that motherhood, fatherhood and children's rights are fundamental social values protected by the European Union and the member states. Therefore, the design and adoption of measures involve significant socio-economic agents such as businesses and employing organisations or the trade union movement. In essence however, they involve the State, its institutions and bodies that should objectively form the frame and relevant structures, which will allow the harmonisation of work and family life. The present study aims at assisting the State in adopting the necessary relevant measures, by suggesting the

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establishment of an Observatory of Reconciliation, an institution and structure that is nowadays regarded as necessary and promoted in national and international level by the European Union.

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INTRODUCTION

The need for harmonizing professional and non-professional life (family and household tasks) has gradually gained importance in the last 20 years, because of the increased female participation in employment in all European countries (63% of the women in the E.U. is part of the labour resource), but also of the drastic changes in family models, changes that have led to the increased number of nuclear and single-parent families. The possibility of combining the conflicting demands between paid employment (not to mention a career) and the changing personal needs and non-professional duties often requires a huge effort in part of the individual, the woman in particular. This incessant struggle for the control of time has been mostly left to the exclusive responsibility of working people, especially women, even though it is gradually flagged as a priority sector for policy implementation in macro and micro level.

1. PHILOSOPHY AND CONTENT OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

The European Union is known to have a long history in trying to achieve Gender Equality and to establish Equal Opportunities between men and women. As an example the following Directives are mentioned: Council Directive 75/117/EEC "*on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women*", (10/02/1975), 76/207/EEC "*on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions*", (09/12/1976) 79/07/EEC regarding "*the progressive implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women in matters of social security*" (19/12/1978), 86/613/EEC "*on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity, including agriculture, in a self-employed capacity, and on the protection of self-employed women during pregnancy and motherhood*" (11/12/1986), 96/34/EC "*on the framework agreement on parental leave concluded by UNICE, CEEP and the ETUC*" (03/06/1996), etc.

However, it has been since 2001 that, taking advantage of the collective experience and the good practices, the European Union formed an integrated Framework Strategy in Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities issues, where there has been a remarkable progress in the clear report of both the content and methodology of including Gender issues in the policy framework, as well as the gender balance in the Community bodies and the groups of experts.

A basic element of the holistic approach that characterises the Framework Strategy is the attention drawn to the expected results and the redistribution of social roles inside the family, the change of gender stereotypes in the family, the domestic time management in favour of the women as well, the conquest of social motherhood and the reconciliation of family and professional responsibilities in the end, as a necessary condition for ensuring equal opportunities in the public sphere and especially sectors like labour, politics, lifelong learning (Anker, 1997) etc. Especially the harmonisation of those two aspects of women's lives constitutes a priority, as it is directly related to the social command for their response in multiple roles that require energy, time and obligations, without even relating to each other since the elements of one are not compatible with those of the other. Quite often for example it appears that the professional and family activities require a female presence (but also a male more rare) at the same time **1** (Bond, Hyman, J. & S. Wise, 2002). Thus it is not accidental that the European Union wished to tackle the serious social issues raised by this disequilibrium, trying to find solutions regarding women's exclusion from the labour market because of motherhood, low fertility rates, gender equality in childcare and household tasks, etc. (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2006).

Equal Opportunities constitute a fundamental philosophical principle of the European social policy, with Equality of Opportunity between men and women at its core. By the term "Equality of Opportunity between men and women" is meant *the absence of any obstacle or barrier based on sex regarding economic, political and social inclusion and requires an equal treatment of men and*

women and the absence of any direct or indirect gender discrimination and – among others – it is stated in Article 23 of the Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union.

For the European Union gender constitutes a significant discrimination that regards the entire population and needs transcendence in the social/cultural practice. Both men and women will not be treated as a special group of individuals among many similar groups. On the other hand, discrimination based on sex affects and often enhances other discriminations based on ethnic or social origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, etc. Policies and practices that at a first glance appear sex-neutral after careful examination may prove to have a different influence on women than men. In this way the current discriminations and inequalities are enhanced and already determined difficulties of women's access to equal opportunities are confirmed. This happens because the relation between women and labour market is mediated by a set of social prejudices, stereotypes and notions regarding the social roles of the sexes.

Towards the achievement and establishment of Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities, the European Union uses two tools: a) positive actions and b) gender mainstreaming in every policy, programme, measure, etc.

2. THE EUROPEAN LABOUR MARKET FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

The European Union in time detected that the current discriminations of structural nature connected to sex, as well as the double and often multiple discrimination experienced by many

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categories of women (immigrants, heads of single parent families, long time unemployed, etc.) and the wider asymmetry between men and women (Gasouka, 2004) call for the continuation and intensification of community action in the field of Equal Opportunities, as well as the adoption of new methods and approaches to this particular issue. This philosophy is also expressed in the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (15/09/1995), according to which one of the strategic objectives of the United Nations is to eliminate discrimination against women and to remove all obstacles towards achieving quality.

Already since 2000 (March 23-24), the Lisbon summit placed special emphasis on the importance of expanding equal opportunities in policies regarding employment, including a decrease in the occupational segregation between men and women and a contribution to the reconciliation of family and professional life. The European Council has taken a step further, by connecting a smooth, free of gender discrimination inclusion of women in the labour market and equal opportunities between the sexes with wider qualitative targets of great importance, such as that of increasing the rate of employed women to 60% by 2010, the main target being the ability of women's full access to a knowledge-based economy, as well as supporting their participation in it, given that information and communication technologies (ICTs) have a growing influence on employment altogether. The role of the Structural Funds – these financial tools of the Community aiming at reinforcing cohesion, improving employment perspectives and promoting sustainable development – in achieving equality between men and women is clearly

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emphasized. Nowadays their operational regulations take matters of gender equality very seriously during the process of programming, realisation, monitoring and assessment.

However, despite the designing, all measures adopted and generally efforts put in all levels, the fact remains that more than 50 million E.U. citizens are characterised as poor and the vast majority of those are women. Thus there is still the issue of studying the living conditions of these women and the ability of their access to systems of social security. At the same time women in the Community still constitute the majority of people employed in "flexible" forms of work, of the unemployed and long-term unemployed. They are still underpaid for work of equal labour quality, time and qualifications; they face the "glass ceiling" phenomenon in their professional evolution and they are under-represented in centres of economic, political and social decision making (Gasouka, 2007). The occupational segregation in male and female professions, women's professional immobility and their limited presence in managerial positions together with an increased participation in informal forms of work are more than clear. It is also known that women comprise the larger percentage of the unemployed and long-term unemployed in the majority of the European countries as well. Men and women employees are still not evenly distributed in professions, sectors and forms of employment. Men usually assume positions of status with higher wages in relation to women (unequal access) who are the first to suffer the consequences of any financial crises (Gasouka, 2007). Broadly speaking, the gender dimension of the European labour market is determined as follows:

1. In almost all member states women's unemployment rate remains systematically higher than that of men, while they are the ones to suffer long-term unemployment.
2. The difference in employment rates between men and women is about an average 20%.
3. Women's employment rate decreases when they have children, whereas it is the opposite for men.

Men and women's division in the labour market remains a major issue for the E.U. Even countries where women have achieved high rates of employment present a segregation in their occupational structures. Women's wages are lower than those of men for the same or same value work, a fact of broad dimensions in Cyprus where the rate of difference is 25%. The difference in wages is higher in the private than in the public sector, whereas structural factors such as age, profession, and field of activity do not seem to contribute in decreasing the wage difference. Finally, the downward trend of traditionally "female" professions due to the introduction of new technologies renders women's vocational training/re-specialisation immediately indispensable, so that they are in a position to meet the demands of the new work positions (Ellinas & Gasouka, 2007).

The gender-based occupational segregation stems from the socialisation process of the sexes, the restrictions that women face regarding paid labour (gender-based division of household labour or a social state based on the family model of the breadwinner husband and his dependent wife) and from the gender discrimination in the Labour Market. Thus in the design and

realisation of the Framework Strategies (1 & 2) there is an emergence of activities of research, study but practice as well, both at the level of the E.U. and the member states that regarded the analysis of women's position in the labour market, the implementation of equality legislation, the effect and impact of social protection and taxation on men and women, individual access to medical and health care, to the systems of social security and pension, the inherent inability of organisation of labour, etc. in particular, both the E.U. and the national administrations (among those Spain, Greece and Cyprus) take action to the direction of:

- **The reduction of gender-based division of the labour market** by activating education and training (placing emphasis on new technologies), reinforcing positive actions inside businesses by establishing motives and highlighting their social role, encouraging women's employment in traditionally "male" professions and men's employment in care professions, actually promoting equal opportunities in all sectors and levels, enhancing the gender dimension in the relation between school and labour market etc.
- **The reconciliation of family and professional life**, a main E.U. priority already since 2002, as it constitutes a critical factor of European policy regarding employment and the process of social inclusion as it is acknowledged as an exceptionally important factor in the quality of family life and employment.

Especially in the European Roadmap for Equality that succeeded the Framework – Strategy and where a plan for the following five

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years is developed, the reconciliation of family and professional life is on its own one of the six main goals of the European policy, next to equal economic independence and not any more as a means to increasing women's participation in labour. In this Roadmap the achievement of the Barcelona goals as a key action is complemented and included in the actions that express the commission's will. For this reason the Commission promotes the exchange of good practices between member states and ensures that the structural funds will finance structures and programmes for the promotion of reconciliation. The EQUAL initiatives have particularly promoted clearly innovative ideas in this field **2**.

It is evident that since 2001 the reconciliation of family and professional life has been a priority of the European Strategy for Equality. From now on, though, the importance of this goal is upgraded and certain means to its achievement are developed. One of those means is for instance the provision of adequate economic and accessible care services for children, the elderly and the disabled. In this field there is an important contribution of the local government in developing a methodology and planning policy at a local level, a policy that through dissemination in Municipalities and Communities may constitute planning for the entire state

3. PHILOSOPHY AND CONTENT OF THE RECONCILIATION/HARMONISATION OF FAMILY AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

It is known that "According to the E.U. the organisation of labour and the balance between work and private life is one of the ten

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dimensions of labour quality and regards the assurance that work regulations, particularly in relation to time and in combination with the provision of auxiliary services and household support services, will allow a correct balance between private and professional life" (KETHI, 2005). The reconciliation of family and professional life can also be expressed as the counterbalance of professional and family obligations. This new term refers to the balanced, equivalent participation of both men and women in family responsibilities in such a way that they are allowed to respond to their professional responsibilities, but also to make the most of their creativity and skills at their work place. The couple's shared responsibility in the family and household tasks and the equal provision of opportunities to the two sexes at the work place, which will contribute to their professional evolution, are a precondition for the implementation of this new policy that comes to complement and advance gender mainstreaming.

The actions planned towards this goal are:

1. *Flexible regulation of work hours both for men and women.* It is claimed that these policies assist the creation of a flexible economy while they improve the living conditions of the citizens. They also help people remain in the labour market by making the most of their potential. However, despite the positive aspects of flexible labour presented in the Commission's text, it is noted that these regulations have mostly to do with women causing inequality between the sexes, which has a negative effect on women's professional situation and their economic independence as well. At the same time there is a counter-suggestion of full-time employment as a

precondition and critical factor of personal and family security and balance.

2. *Increase and improvement of health services.* Europe has to tackle a triple challenge in relation to the demographic issue. The shrinking of the active population, the decrease in birth rates and the growth of the elderly population. The regulations that will lead to a better balance between work and private life are part of the solution of the demographic problem, offering economical and accessible infrastructures of childcare, as required by Barcelona's agenda. It has set a goal of achieving, by 2010, the provision of childcare for 90% of children aged between three and the mandatory school age and for 33% of children aged below three. It also proposes the provision of services that meet the needs of care for the elderly and the disabled. The quality of these services must be improved while at the same time there should be a development and better evaluation of the qualifications of the relevant staff, that will mostly be comprised by women.
3. *Better reconciliation practices for women and men.* The structures and services adapt very slowly to the contemporary state of things where man and women work. Very few men take up parental leave or have a part-time employment (7,4% compared to 32,6% of women). Women therefore have the main care of the children and other dependent family members. Men should be encouraged to take on more family responsibilities, mostly

through greater use of parental leaves and paternity leaves (KETHI, 2001).

The reconciliation of family and professional life is, or at least should be a serious matter for both men and women. The difficulties that women, especially mothers, face in finding and keeping paid labour, the deeply rooted prejudices according to which women solely are responsible for the family care as well as cultural expectations that want men to be the main bread winners are factors that may deteriorate gender inequality (Mouriki, 2005). As mentioned above, men's participation in the combination of family and work life is a critical and difficult at the same time issue. Critical because without men's participation there cannot be an equal distribution of responsibilities and difficult because it is necessary to promote changes in society and the mentality of every man and woman. Already since 2000 the Ministers of Employment and Social Policy of the European Union (29/6) issued a resolution stating the view that the principle of equality between men and women entails the need for counterbalancing women's disadvantage regarding terms of access and participation in the labour market, but also men's disadvantage regarding the terms of their involvement in family life. These disadvantages rise from social practices that still postulates that non paid labour for the family care is a basic responsibility of women whereas paid labour that is closely related to the economical life is men's principal responsibility.

Therefore tools are needed that will help a greater sensitisation of the society and the authorities that are responsible for the implementation of the community legislation and the

national regulations regarding the reconciliation of family and professional life, in order to facilitate changes in structures and behaviours and to develop new models of cooperation between women and men. The role of businesses and the selection on their part of business strategies that are friendly to family and women are considered to be of particular importance. In this way they go around phenomena such as the "glass ceiling" and have the ability to make the most of all skills, talents, and expectations of both men and women.

Quite a few businesses have started to realise that quality human capital may prove to be a comparative advantage in modern market economy. It may also function as an important profit multiplier for a business, when it meets the necessary requirements and has the knowledge and skills to provide high level services. It is obvious that workers who have a normal family life and balance between home and work without particular problems are more productive and raise the competitiveness of the business. For this reason, medium and large businesses are invited to plan and implement actions that intend to make the most of human capital in relation to the harmonisation of family and professional life of employed men and women.

A centre role in this effort is played by workers' familiarisation with Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), Life Long Learning and the continuing vocational training of the resources of every business. Human capital and the investment in developing individual skills, in knowledge as inextricable elements of labour are the driving force for the development and productivity of a company. The introduction and utilisation of ICTs in businesses is expected to lead to a qualitative enhancement of

human resources and to reinforce the competitiveness and profits of businesses decisively.

The familiarisation of both sexes workers by the use of the Internet and the development of e-business systems facilitate business activities. At the same time, despite whatever objections there may be in the relation of women and ICTs, they offer knowledge and qualifications to workers in order to meet the demands of the modern market and the information society. It is also important that ICTs can help workers organize their work time better to the advantage of their family/private life. The widespread use of the Internet, telework, the introduction of flexible work programmes that will facilitate working couples can be enhanced in order to offer businesses quality labour product on one hand and to facilitate couples of "double employment" harmonise their family/private and professional lives.

Apart from that, in cooperation with Universities and other education agencies, companies can implement injob programmes regarding the continuing vocational education and training of their staff **3**. The enhancement of skills of the human resources and the investment in skills and knowledge reinforce business productivity and shield it against the competition. At the same time the role of workers who obtain the ability to manage information and new technologies correctly inside an ongoing learning activity is clearly enhanced.

As a result, together with the business, workers themselves regardless of sex optimise their skills, become more productive and reinforce their position in the productive process. This enables them to upgrade their role and position in every business and offers them a relative employment security. This fact is regarded

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as necessary for a balanced and functional connection between the professional and private/family life of workers of both sexes.

In light of the things mentioned above, it is advisable that there will be a formulation of a series of actions aiming at raising the difficulties in achieving a reconciliation/harmonisation of family and professional life and creating opportune conditions for the implementation of measures and actions to the advantage of this important issue, through the production of knowledge regarding the parameters of the problem. Among the first relevant actions, the establishment of an Observatory seems particularly useful – an Observatory that includes a set of actions aiming at a multidimensional intervention, both for recording the phenomenon and monitoring its progress, and for formulating and implementing coherent suggestions/proposals for policy planning and taking initiatives based on gender perspective.

4. WHAT IS AN OBSERVATORY

It is a structure equipped with the relevant human resources and the necessary logistical infrastructure that operates – at least in Cyprus – in the framework of two ministries responsible for gender issues, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Labour. It systematically combines economotechnical, scientific, research, informational and administrative activity, with the organised cooperation and corporativeness in national and international level. It aims at producing/offering social services and scientific knowledge and it has the necessary means and tools to achieve its goals and aspirations. It stands out for its financial and

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administrative autonomy, and its legal entrenchment. In its practice and operation it constitutes a system, that is a harmonically organised set, comprised of the abovementioned elements, which are interdependent in the realisation of its goals and objectives (Holevas, 1995). The inputs and outputs of the structure are the expression of these elements. Inputs are the necessary human and material resources as well as information of any nature that come in to be utilized. Outputs are the transformations of resources into products/services based on a particular organisational process. The aim of the operation of an Observatory is *the assumption of a primary role in the collection of data and statistics regarding important social issues/demands of our time, by which it can later feed the relevant policies and practices of the State and widely social, economical, gender, etc. agencies.* Based on this quality, the Observatory cooperates with governmental or non-governmental, national or international organisations, responsible for relevant issues (e.g. phenomena of racism or xenophobia, unemployment, violence against women, children's rights, etc.). The Observatory coordinates its activities with the corresponding actions of the national government and the institutions of the E.U. It should be noted however that the information forwarded to the Observatory can only be used for the abovementioned purposes and under the conditions set by the forwarding service. Their level of protection will be equivalent to the one that arises from the orders of Directive 95/46/EC. On the other hand, public organisations are not obliged to provide information characterised as confidential in their national law.

As an institution the Observatory was highlighted by the E.U., which recognises the importance of cooperation for combating the abovementioned social problems, the added value of information from other people's experiences and the importance of collecting objective and reliable data through the utilisation of New Technologies and not only those. Besides these particular problems constitute clear violations of human dignity, human rights and the fundamental freedoms on which the European Union is based. By the institution of the Observatories that the Community promotes it confirms (as several national governments of course) that the policies and practices introduced are most appropriate and best targeted. In short, the Observatory is a critical weapon in the arsenal of combating social discrimination and inequality and, especially in this case, that connected to gender (Diamantopoulou, 2007). Given the contemporary circumstances its imperativeness is undisputed and its role appears to be exceptionally important. Thanks to the operation of various Observatories to this day we are in a position to form a clearer picture about issues such as racism, trafficking, or any kind of violation of human rights, etc. For example it appears that the role of the European Monitoring Centre (EUMC) **4** is quite important in international level in the field of racism and discrimination in the E.U., as well as that of everyday situation of ethnic minorities. In its latest annual report it focused in the field of employment and access to education, as well as housing for the first time (Diamantopoulou, 2007). Its operation proved that the production of comparable data regarding what happens in every country allows for successful practices to be detected, practices that can be implemented (with the proper encouragement) in other countries that need them. It is evident

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therefore that the collection, analysis and the appropriate dissemination of data are the added value of EUMC. Of course of equal importance and breadth are the Observatory for Employment in Dublin and the Observatories of Equal Opportunities **5** and Women's Health **6** that take action in Spain, etc. From the point of organisational structure and operation special interest is showed by the Observatory constituted in Greece by the "Information Society", a company of the Greek public sector to which the present study owes a lot.

An Observatory should, apart from the collection, analysis and dissemination of data, take action in the design and realisation of research/studies, in organising events, conferences, in publishing regular reports, in publications and mostly the development of a networking system and cooperation with individuals, agencies, foundations and so on, at national and international level. Among these institutions there should be a prominent position held by entities representing the specific "sensitive" social groups, the interests of which are in the centre of attention of an Observatory. Particular attention should be definitely paid so that there are equal opportunities of information for everyone, especially for special or vulnerable groups (e.g. disabled people, special groups of women threatened by social exclusion, the imprisoned, etc.), and thus avoid the involuntary, but often, reproduction of forms of social exclusion regarding certain groups of the population in the field of information.

5. OBSERVATORY FOR THE RECONCILIATION/HARMONISATION OF FAMILY AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE OF THE WORKING PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY WOMEN

The aim of the Observatory of the Reconciliation/Harmonisation of Family and Professional Life of the Working People, especially Women, in essence and above all a centre of documentation, is *the collection, processing and utilisation of qualitative and quantitative data that are connected to this important social demand in the Republic of Cyprus, with the simultaneous dissemination of relevant information, good practices and positive examples as well as the creation (design – realisation) and submission of similar researches, studies and suggestions to the State and whoever they may concern, with a simultaneous development of networks of corporate relations with socio-economic institutions and public services at both national and international level.* At the same time, the Observatory aims at dealing successfully with the lack of centrally planned policy for the Reconciliation/Harmonisation of Family and Professional Life, as well as the systematic and organised assessment of the implementation of reconciliation policies, so that the dissemination of the results of the Observatory actions contribute decisively to improving women's position and on the other hand to formulating and developing positive policies towards families and couples (www.kethi.gr). This specific institution is particularly addressed to employing organisations, economic and social partners, structures that promote issues of gender equality and equal opportunities,

women's organisations, researchers of similar issues, any person that might be interested or the entire society.

It is noted that the need for the creation and operation of such an observatory was evident in Cyprus after the realisation of measure 2.1 of CI EQUAL regarding the Reconciliation. Within its frame interesting researches, studies, guides, scientific tools and sensitisation exercises were developed, important material in other words, but also numerous good practices that could be optimised in the future and that reinforces the Observatory already since its first steps. More specifically:

5.1 The objectives of the Observatory are

(<http://www.observatory.gr/page/default.asp?id=4>):

- To create a mechanism of consultation and cooperation between institutions, organisations and individuals involved in any way in the process of tackling the phenomenon.
- To examine/map the problem and to assess its quantitative and qualitative dimensions.
- To contribute to a most effective planning of the organisation and operation of services/structures of relevant Counselling through the dissemination of information.
- To offer reliable, in time documentation of quantitative and qualitative data related to the achievement of the Reconciliation.

- To collect, assess and utilize quantitative and qualitative data regarding the Reconciliation.
- To compare data and objectively assess Cyprus' progress towards the achievement of the Reconciliation.
- To transfer and disseminate good practices and models as well as to exchange experiences, know-how and information between Cypriot institutions and European or other international institutions.
- To improve the cognitive basis on which the national strategy and the actions for the reconciliation are formed.
- To analyse and interpret data resulting in the framework of the Observatory, either by primary research and studies or provided by affiliated institutions.
- To formulate specific suggestions to the State, various social actors, institutions of equality, businesses, etc.
- To monitor and support the development of the field of Information and Communication Technologies.
- To compose work groups and to form views with institutions, social partners, special scientists, independent authorities and other natural or legal persons that are interested.

- To search for and record good practices from Greece and the rest of Europe.
- To disseminate the knowledge of the above to society.
- To represent Cyprus in European and International Fora.
- To contribute, through suggestions, in the work of the statutory public institution for the Strategy of Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities of the Cypriot Republic.
- To contribute in the elimination of stereotypes, attitudes and behaviours regarding gender equality.

Apart from the above, the objectives include the design and construction of an organised Data Base that will host the available knowledge and will contribute to their processing and answering various questions, as well as the construction of a bilingual web page (Greek and English) that will contribute to communication, action coordination and publicity. The Scientific Committee of the Observatory takes on the responsibility of the construction, monitoring and coordination. Both are central means towards the realisation of the objectives of the Observatory (www.kethi.gr).

It is obvious that the ideological/philosophical background of the specific framework is based for starters on gender perspective and the protection of women's human rights. It distinguishes between the terms of "sex" and "gender" and socially defines the different

roles, attitudes and behaviours between men and women. *"It recognises the different status and position between man and women that are socially and not biologically determined. It supports that women's limited access to matters of property and control, political participation, work, etc., is caused to the roles ascribed to them and consequently marginalize them from material and non-material resources. It regards the interaction between sex, class and nationality as particularly important. Furthermore, it develops policies of prevention and management of the problem based on gender experiences of men and women, but it also recognises the diverse impact of policies on men and women"* (www.kethi.gr).

5.2 Categories of services of the Observatory

(<http://www.observatory.gr/page/default.asp?id=4>):

The services of the Observatory are distinguished in the following categories:

(1) the provision of information regarding the achievement of the Reconciliation in Cyprus, through the collection of relevant quantitative and qualitative data and their processing.

(2) the planning and realisation of primary research, which according to their range is carried out by either third parties through competition or internally by the Observatory staff. (At the same time it collects studies conducted by affiliated institutions and performs quantitative and qualitative secondary analyses.)

(3) the provision of counselling services and the formulation of specific proposals and suggestions to concerned parties of the

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public and private sector regarding issues that relate to the Reconciliation.

(4) the formation of an international network of information and exchange of experiences regarding issues of the Reconciliation.

(5) the assumption of the role of the agency responsible for the coordination and formulation of suggestions on critical issues regarding the Reconciliation, by organising work groups and/or discussions between institutions concerned, social partners, special scientists, etc.

The aforementioned actions, which are about to form a field of gathering information and recording the situation, will have a decisive contribution to the operation of a permanent forum between the affiliated and concerned institutions and individuals. This "forum", that will be supplied with the collection and processing of available information from any research and study conducted, as well as from the data processed by the Observatory, will be coordinated by the Scientific Committee. In this way an institutional framework of dialogue development and consultation is actually formed that will involve and activate dialogue between the parties concerned. The database and the *web page* will particularly contribute to this direction.

It should be noted however that the collection, organisation and synthesis of all the available knowledge regarding the promotion of the Reconciliation in Cyprus and internationally will include, among others, international contracts, national laws,

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scientific articles, various national and international policies, the available products of research and statistical data, information and data from institutions of equality, Departments of Women's Studies from various universities, governmental institutions, NGOs and the Media.

5.3 Expected results

The results that will arise from the suggested actions are expected to be the following:

- development of updated information/data on the issue of the Reconciliation.
- production of documented and assessed knowledge that will contribute to a more effective organisation of educational courses and the conduct of campaigns of information and sensitisation.
- formation of a unique mechanism of recording the phenomenology of the issue, of intervention, instigation and support of actions to the benefit of working people, especially women.
- cooperation and activation of institutions and individuals that take action in this subject on a national basis and have the experience.
- activation of wider forces whose overall objective will be the promotion of the Reconciliation.
- facilitation of access to information, both of governmental and non-governmental (infra)structures.

Because of the material gathered with reliable and effective methodology and its relation to the targets of the operation and according to the aforementioned results that are expected to arise from the operation of the Observatory, at a first level the benefited will have to do with networks connecting relevant European and national institutions, governmental bodies and institutions, International Organisations and NGOs, etc. Apart from that, it will contribute to the work of policy-makers, experts, the officials and advisors of various Ministries, members of NGOs and women's organisations, aiming at locating the strategies of achieving the Reconciliation. At a second level, it will assist the work of members of universities and research institutes by providing theoretic and empirical data.

By taking the aspects of this issue related to social and human rights as well as sex discrimination into special consideration, the Observatory and especially the creation of a forum will attempt to reinforce and network various similar initiatives that have been adopted or will be at community and national level in the frame of various areas of policy. It will formulate and reinforce networks connecting relevant European institutions, governmental bodies and institutions, International Organisations and NGOs, those involved in the promotion of the Reconciliation and the development of structures and services of care for families a working parents.

Finally, in the frame of full cooperation it will try to receive and give data to and from the European Commission, the European Parliament, especially the Committee of Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities, as well as other Committees dealing with various aspects of these issues at European level. Also, from the

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Council of Europe, the Committee of the Regions, Eurostat, Europol, Eurojust, etc. With such activity, it is obvious that the Observatory can put the issue of the Reconciliation in Cyprus on a new footing.

5.4 Structure of the Observatory

The operation of the Observatory is based on the principles of modern management, resulting in forming the necessary strategy regarding its long-term objectives, the policy that will ensure the success of its pursuits and the necessary relevant planning. The correct division of labour and the departmentation based on specialisation are regarded as critical factors of success and efficiency of the actions of the Observatory. The distribution of responsibilities and their allocation to collective bodies of the institution contributes, among others, to the compilation of the necessary organogram in order to ensure that the actions developed in the frame of the institution tend towards the success of its objectives. Of course, a basic condition for success is the achievement of efficient communication, in vertical and horizontal arrangement of positions, inside the Observatory, but also the communication with agencies outside the institution, but are concerned (Holevas, 1995).

5.4.1 Human resources

The distinct, profoundly social dimension of an Observatory already since its establishment requires extreme caution during the process of covering its needs in staff both on a short- and long-term basis. At the same time a careful job description is required,

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with a clear definition of its duties and the place where they will be performed, the time it will be completed, the wage given, etc. Regarding both administrative and scientific or other positions, after planning the staff needs of the structure there should be provision regarding not only their acquisition but also their ongoing education and training on matters of Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities and not only those, as it is evident that an Observatory needs high-level staff. The number and terms of employment will depend on the budget of the institution and the will of the co-responsible Ministries, but also the relevant institutional framework. More specifically:

A. The head of the Observatory will be a representative Management Board of nine members, comprising (totally indicatively) of representatives of the following institutions:

- Ministry of Justice and Public Order
- Ministry of Labour and Social Security
- Commissioner for Administration (Ombudsman)
- Institutions of Equality
- Women's Departments of Parties
- Employing agencies
- Trade unions etc.

B. The scientific responsibility and action monitoring as well as the assessment of the course of operation of the Observatory is assumed by the *Scientific Committee*, that is comprised of experts and scientists, specialists in matters of Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities, with a higher participation of women. It is

responsible not only for developing, supporting and monitoring actions that will contribute to the documented collection of data and the scientific analysis of the data, but also for all the activities that express the objectives of the institution and point out its scientific adequacy for their fulfilment. It is also responsible for their maintenance, the formulation of rules of operation and the publication of information leaflets and the dissemination of the operation of the Observatory.

C. A Legal Advisor assumes the legal coverage of the decisions and actions of the institution and its bodies.

D. The administrative-financial responsibility and generally the safeguarding of the smooth operation of the Observatory is assumed by a *Manager* with proven experience and sensitivity on gender issues.

E. The staff of the Observatory is comprised of individuals of high qualifications and increased sensitivity on gender matters – researchers, information specialists, administrative-financial staff is necessary within its frame. In any the Management Board in cooperation with the Scientific Committee will proceed to the description of the current work positions and the required professional skills for any position as mentioned above.

5.4.2 Departments:

The Observatory, like all similar organisations, should be divided in Departments, each one specializing in performing certain tasks

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(Departmentation). This specialisation involves all the individuals that belong to a department and is characterised by the task performed. It contributes to the obtainment of knowledge and skills, to the familiarisation with the work place and all the technological and other means that are used (Holevas, 1995). The departmentation, as known, is performed based on certain criteria. In this case it is preferable to be done based on the distinction of the operation of each department (operational distinction), which is the most common **7**. Each department (operation) may be further divided in depth according to the needs of the institution in subdivisions. More specifically the following division is suggested:

- A. Department of Studies and Research
- B. Department of Supporting Services
- C. Department of Administrative Services
- D. Department of Financial Services
- E. Department of Information

It is noted that within the frame of the Observatory and especially the Department of Supporting Services there are:

- A. The "Online Statistics" service of the Observatory, which offers the possibility of dynamic presentation and production of statistical data. Through this service any person concerned is offered free access to the statistical data of research conducted by the Observatory regarding the Reconciliation.
- B. The Archive of Studies and Reports. The Observatory, as the central information agency about the Reconciliation/Harmonisation of Family and Professional Life

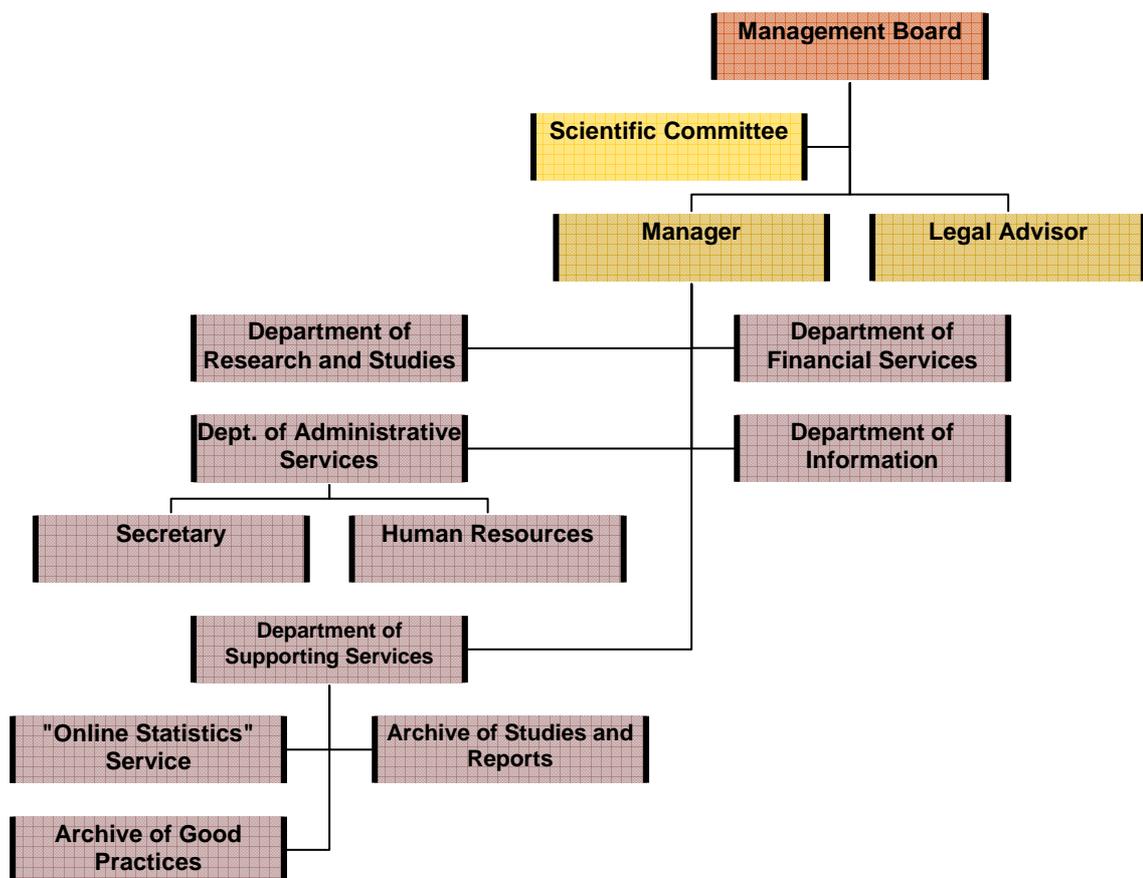
of Working People and especially Women, develops an archive of research/studies conducted by Greek and foreign institutions regarding the course of the country not only to the achievement of the Reconciliation. The same Archive includes the Reports issued by the Observatory and similar institutions of the Republic of Cyprus, the European Union, etc.

C. The Good Practices Archive in the priority fields of the Reconciliation, aiming at highlighting the progress made both at a European and international level, since the transfer and dissemination of best methods and practices and the support of experience exchange between Cypriot institutions. An interesting similar experience of operation of the above subdivisions is offered by the administrative structure of the Observatory of Information Society in Greece (<http://www.observatory.gr/page/default.asp?id=4>).

5.4.3 Organogram

The organogram demonstrates the anatomy of the institution, its vertical and horizontal structure. It shows the levels of administration, the executive bodies, the assisting departments and its main collective bodies. Its objective is informative, critical and ethical.

The following organogram demonstrates the organisational and internal structure of the Observatory.



AFTERWORD

The combination of family and professional life is a fundamental component of gender perspective in the European strategy regarding employment and the process for social inclusion (Mouriki, 2005). It aims at promoting a more cohesive society by ensuring favourable conditions for men and women's entrance, re-entrance and stay in the labour market. At the same time it is related to the development of human resources, the achievement of business profit, but also transnational socio-economic growth. This important demand of our times urges the acceptance of the fact that whatever regulations towards the Reconciliation must acknowledge:

1. that participation in family care is an equal responsibility of both men and women and to serve them to the same extent.
2. that a balanced participation of men and women both in the labour market and family life is a necessary element to the development of the society and that motherhood, fatherhood and children's rights are essential social values protected by the society, the member states and the European Union.
3. that to facilitate women in successfully combining their professional and family obligations is both their right and a precondition of their evolution.

In recent years there has been an evident participation of businesses in family policies and the relevant sensitisation of a number of employers appears to be raised. It has to do with measures of a limited range that do not involve the great majority

of people employed in the private sector (Gasouka, 2007). Even the current system of social security and welfare can neither be regarded as adequate or efficient, as it is limited to economic benefits and tax reductions. At the same time the conflict between workers' family and professional life is stronger, especially when it regards highly qualified parents who are totally committed to their professional life or in general the so-called dual-career families. In order to tackle with this problem, all EU countries have developed policies for the reconciliation of family and work either at a legislative level or by the initiative of large businesses, the help of trade unions, feminist or other organisations that aim at sensitising the public opinion in matters like the irrational expansion of the work hours, the role of the father, etc. More specifically, where businesses are concerned, employers have started to realise that the balance between family and professional life contributes to a decrease in sex differences and quality improvement in the work place. However the most important aspect is that policies of harmonisation between family and career forms "win-win" situations: a) workers enjoy a better work environment and gain more satisfaction and self confidence, b) businesses benefit from motivated, ambitious staff that has less absences and more productivity, c) the harmonisation helps create a flexible economy that uses all its human resources constructively. Therefore, the measures for harmonising the family/professional life of workers, that should be combined with other measures of social policy, should aim at developing social awareness and the economy.

At the same time it should be understood that family democracy is undermined by the exhaustion and frustration

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caused to women by occupational segregation inside the family, the abandonment of professional ambitions or the public sphere itself that often is imposed by this division. Never before in history the demand of redefining the social roles inside the family has been so imperatively critical. Equally important appears to be the redefinition of the paternal role as well as its emergence as a fundamental coordinate of family democracy and equality. At the same time, what also results from the above is the defining role of the State, that knows very well that there cannot be economic growth, social cohesion, even democracy, if women remain at the margins of labour, an eternally reserve labour army, and if workers of both sexes experience a conflicting, stressful relation between their family and professional life (Pillinger, 2002). Thus it is not strange that issues of gender equality and equal opportunities, with emphasis on the reconciliation/harmonisation of family and professional life, are already high on the agenda of the national governments and the European Union. The creation and successful, efficient operation of an Observatory of Reconciliation is bound to have an important contribution to the relevant efforts of Cypriot State and its institutions.

NOTES

¹ Of course, the consequences are equally negative to both aspects of life. On one hand there could be a reduced performance at work, and on the other hand the parents' inadequate presence at home may have unpleasant implications in the children's upbringing.

² The countries of the European Union have a number of projects and plans to achieve this reconciliation. In general, the measures adopted by either the state or the businesses, or non-governmental organisations pertain mostly to women and their difficulty in combining their family obligations with work. Broadly speaking, the adopted policies mostly include the arrangement and flexibility of work time and childcare.

³ Great emphasis is placed by businesses and organisations on facilitating women to successfully combine their family and professional obligations. Several actions are funded to this direction, such as the reinforcement of the operational cost of structures within the business for keeping and/or creatively occupying the workers' children, telework and the adaptation of administration models to the models of corporate social responsibility. The expected results from the pilot application are regarded to cause the required changes in the inside of businesses, so that working women are not obstructed in their professional choices and to better manage their working time – on the other hand, businessmen are also expected to value the benefit from the increase in productivity, the limitation of phenomena of absence or employment termination as well as inability to assume new responsibilities.

⁴ The Observatory studies the extent and progression of phenomena and demonstrations of racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism, it analyses their causes, consequences and results and examines examples of good practice. To this end, it collects, records and analyses data gathered by research centres of the member states, the community institutional bodies, non-governmental organisations or international organisations. Apart from these, it has to form and coordinate a "European network of information on racism and xenophobia" (RAXEN).

⁵ Observatory of Equal Opportunities of Spain. Formed in 2000 and belonging to the Ministry of Labour, it is an organisation whose fundamental objectives are the collection, analysis and dissemination of periodical information on the condition of women in the country and the assessment of the society regarding gender equality. Based on the resulting data, it aims at planning policies, actions and activities that will point out the importance of this information in different spheres of life. A significant part of its actions, which are diffused in all of Spain, regard issues of reconciliation of women's family and professional life and the adjustment of legislation to this aim. Several Autonomous Communities including Melilla, six women's organisations, INJUVE and representatives from every Ministry participate in the Observatory. In Spain there are corresponding equivalent institutions in the Autonomous Communities as well.

⁶ Observatory for Women's Health. Formed in 2006, this initiative started from the suggestions gathered in the Madrid Statement of the European Panel on Gender Mainstreaming Health in 2001, with the support of the WHO Regional Office for Europe. The Statement examines the acknowledgement on behalf of the health

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authorities the biological differences and the social roles between men and women, and the recognition of gender as a determinant and the need for changes in the organisational culture of health services. The objectives of the Observatory are the collection and dissemination of information aiming at improving the knowledge regarding the causes and dimensions of differences between men and women located in the field of health (e.g. the use of the right indicators). The Observatory also processes and disseminates studies, analyses towards the introduction of innovations in the frame of health organisations related to primary health care, training and research. The Observatory offers help and technical support to the Interterritorial Council of SNS (Sistema Nacional de Salud) in developing indicators, methodology and procedures that will allow the analysis of the reformatory policies of health of the SNS, from a gender perspective, in collaboration with Women's Institute.

⁷ Other forms of Departmentation are the division according to services, the geographical division, the division based on the user category of the products, etc.

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- <http://www.diamantopoulou.gr/content/view/92/113/lang.el/>

- www.kethi.gr

- <http://www.observatory.gr/page/default.asp?id=4>

ANNEX

(source: <http://www.observatory.gr/page/default.asp?id=4>)

Communication

How to communicate with us



Observatory for the **Reconciliation**

Address:

P.O.Box

Telephone:

Fax:

e-mail

1. Communication

You may use the following model in order to communicate with the Observatory.

Fields with (*) are required

E-mail (*)

Name

Last name

Position

Organisation/
Company

Contact address

Telephone



2. Study search

Thematic unit:

Field of action:

Institution of
realisation:

Commissioning
agency:

Date: From To

Key word:

Sort by: Date
 Title
 Commissioning agency

3. Best Practices search

Field of action:

Thematic area:

Group of users:

Service:

Country:

Year of realisation: From To

Key word:

Search by: Date
 Title
 Country

Αναζήτηση

Καθαρισμός

4. Event

Relevant Study

Date: From To Place:

Sort by: Date

Title

Place

Καθαρισμός

5. Other observatories

-African Women's Rights Observatory,

<http://geoinfo.uneca.org/awro/>

Observatory of gender and poverty <http://geoinfo.uneca.org/awro/>

-AER Observatory on Migrant Women (AEROMW)

<http://www.aer.eu/main-issues/equal-opportunities/observatory-on-migrant-women-omw.htm>

-African Centre for Gender and Social Development (ACGS)

<http://192.132.208.14/acgd/main.htm>

-European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies

http://www.euro.who.int/observatory/HiTs/Updates/20031031_9

-Observatory on Gender Policies and Good Practices.

[http://192.132.208.14/acgd/m](http://192.132.208.14/acgd/main.htm)

-Observatory on Gender Policies and Good Practices.

<http://www.ot-gender.org>

Observatory

Women

Entrepreneurs

<http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/entrepreneurship/craft/craft-women/craft-obswomen.htm>

Observatory of Equality of Cyprus (ΠΙΚ) pik@cytenet.com.cy

Observatory of gender and poverty <http://ogp.colmex.mx/>

Mediterranean

Migration

Observatory

<http://www.mmo.gr/index.htm>