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Circle of Inspiring Women for a Sustainable Future

“Building Bridges of Cooperation”

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Electra Palace Hotel

Dear Mrs Zefi Dimadama, General Director of the International Centre for Black Sea Studies, Delegates, ladies and gentlemen. I am honored for giving me the floor.

“ My friend, Tom, is a drummer. He told me a story about being invited to play with a group of musicians who were more talented than he was. Being a little nervous to play with these musicians, he made the mistake a drummer can’t afford to make: He followed instead of lead. Shortly into their first song, the lead guitar player stopped playing and waved off the other musicians, who stopped also. Then he turned to Tom sitting behind his drum set and yelled, “Hey, Tom, you’re the drummer! You’re supposed to be driving this train, not riding it!”

It’s about time, now, women start driving the train.

The financial crisis is a result of men’s policies. They have led the whole world to a new poverty. Austerity measures are unavoidable, consequently the development seemed these years as a utopia.

“It is clear that austerity measures have had a huge impact on employment, health, income, pensions and work-life balance. Austerity measures have proven to be failing citizens in general, and in particular, women. It is vital that women are seen as actors for change and development as we need a new economic model which requires the full participation of women in all areas of life,” states Joanna Maycock, Secretary-General of the EWL.

2015 is a window of opportunity to strengthen women's rights throughout the world. 2015 marks the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), the adoption of the new Sustainable Development Goals as well as the renewal of the European Commission's own Strategy on Equality between women and men, all of which should firmly place women's rights and gender equality at the center of the European and international political agendas.

Gender budgeting and gender impact assessments are vital to mitigate the long term consequences of austerity measures taken in Europe today."

Women's economic independence in Times of Austerity, is more than vital. We face the need for a "Pink Deal".

Sustainable development is not an option, but THE ONLY OPTION for a shared future on this planet.

Women can transform these potential into business into growth, into EPD, into eradication of poverty.

The Rio+ 20 outcome document affirms: "*We reaffirm our commitment to strengthen **international cooperation** to address the persistent challenges related to sustainable development for all... In this regard, we reaffirm the need to achieve economic stability, sustained economic growth, promotion of social equity and protection of the environment while enhancing gender equality, the empowerment of women and equal opportunities for all, and the protection, survival and development of children to their full potential, including through education*" (United Nations, 2012a, para. 11).

Of course there are **Women of Influence**, who can share their stories of professional success and personal triumph on their rise to the top. There are high profile women who can definitely provide their advices and inspiration in an **environment that promotes networking, learning and growing.**

The conventional wisdom is that women cooperate more easily. Women have the charisma of doing synergies and they can help each other to establish fruitful connections. They explore collaborations with businesses in completely different fields than theirs. And they succeed because of their empathy.

Women are often thought of as being more egalitarian than men.

Women organizations also can help to the fulfilment of this target: building the necessary bridges.

Business and Professional Women (BPW) is an international organization. I have the privilege being the President of Athens club. BPW works word widely focusing in collaboration and cohesion to achieve the goals that BPW has imposed. We know that Empowering women and girls with more choices and more freedoms is crucial to achieving a better future for all and this is among the crucial means for enhancing development. Sustainability and gender (in)equality are inherently interrelated.

Collaboration, network, advocating as BPW does in participating in UN where it tries to raise awareness through “Women Empowerment Principles”, which are an umbrella for our advocacy actions.

It has also launch a campaign on **Equal pay Day** which is and should remain its priority. This initiative helps in reducing the pay gap.

BPW is fighting for **more Women on Board**. BPW works at the forefront for the change of legislations of many countries towards gender equity at work to put more women in decision- making process.

Having acknowledged that women as gender can inspire, can create business, collaboration, and improve the legislation of their country towards the development, it is a vital necessity for them to have better access to decision-making positions in the economy.

Synergies can be created within the **Social entrepreneurship**. Social entrepreneurship is mainly a sector where women get involved, it creates jobs, pushes women and strengthens women, which of course, helps the sustainability of the economies. It creates **more gender equality** and mainly **it inspires innovation!!!**

We must advocate to put social entrepreneurship higher in the political agenda and raise the awareness of the stakeholders to be involved.

Dear ladies and gentlemen, I feel privileged that I am born, a woman. And I also feel happy that **I had never been refrained**

- from being educated, from working (I am a lawyer),
- from having my own children that have grown up and they are successful scientists today,
- from enjoying the trust of the others in both my personal and my professional life.

It's about time, all of us, not to refrain from actions that commit the social and economic development of our country.

Thanks to the initiative of Mrs Dimadama, **today we are manifesting** the new, collective, and pioneering era, through the **joined forces** of the inspiring women **of achieving the development of our region**, by the means of:

- Strengthening the gender equality,
- Economically empowering women
- Promote women entrepreneurship
- Facilitate the access of women to decision-making positions in the economy
- Capsizing the stereotypes

This sets the corner stone for a new THINK TANK ECOSYSTEM, and it is the very reason that it is an emotionally charged moment.

I thank you all for your attention.
