



Brussels, 28 November 2017

To: Commissioner Věra Jourová (Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality)

CC: Commissioner Elżbieta Bieńkowska (Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs)
Commissioner Tibor Navracsics (Education, Culture, Youth and Sport)
Commissioner Mariya Gabriel (Digital Economy and Society)

RE: WEP calls for a real EU Strategy for women entrepreneurs.

Dear Commissioner Věra Jourová,

We are writing following our workshop on *'Innovation in Women's Digital Entrepreneurship'* we organized in the European Parliament on the 22nd November with MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen and key stakeholders. The Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) is the pan-European network umbrella association representing, promoting and advocating on behalf of women entrepreneurs from all industries and sectors. With the adoption by the European Commission of an Action Plan to tackle the gender pay gap on the 20th November, we believe this is a timely opportunity to improve the European legislative framework for women entrepreneurs.

Promoting women entrepreneurship not only tackles issues of gender inequality; it also acts as a driver for change, for women's lives and for the economy. Notwithstanding the growing evidence that investing in women's economic empowerment spurs growth, women are still less likely to become entrepreneurs, in part due to cultural and societal barriers. According to European Commission's data, even though women make 52% of the total European population but only 34.4% of the EU self-employed and 30% of start-up entrepreneurs¹. We believe that there is insufficient institutional action to tackle the obstacles for women entrepreneurs.

Dismantling the obstacles for women entrepreneurs necessitates creating a level playing field with men entrepreneurs. First, there is still a lot to be done in terms of education of young girls; ensuring that girls are not discouraged from careers in business and tech. Entrepreneurial learning for girls and women should be enforced through a strategic framework of national and European policies. Secondly, access to financing remains one of the main obstacles for women entrepreneurs. Venture capital is male dominated and oriented, and several studies on the interactions between venture capitalists and women entrepreneurs have found a divergent approach for men and women entrepreneurs with the latter being asked mostly risk prevention questions². Alternative means of financing such as business angels must be encouraged through targeted programs and support for the creation of communities of women business angels.

Europe is in the midst of a digital disruption and women entrepreneurs are not part of it. There needs to be a systemic change in attitude towards women entrepreneurs, especially in the digital field. We welcome the efforts of the European Commission, but we believe there should be a real EU strategy for women entrepreneurs.

Sincerely,

Grazia Rendo
Chairwoman, WEP

¹ European Commission "Statistical Data on Women Entrepreneurs in Europe" 2014

http://ec.europa.eu/growth/content/study-statistical-data-women-entrepreneurs-europe-0_en

² European Institute on Gender Equality "Gender in Entrepreneurship" 2016 p.7 <http://eige.europa.eu/rdc/eige-publications/gender-entrepreneurship>