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***"The Baltic Sea Region; a Region with Gender Equality as a driving force for Regional development and Growth"***

***Baltic Sea Region Conference***

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*Honourable Chairperson,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Good to be back in Stockholm.

It is a great pleasure to be here. I would like to thank the organizers for inviting me to this conference. My thanks go especially to Ms. Britt-Marie Torstensson, the president of WINNET Sweden and other colleagues, whom I was pleased to meet before in Brussels.

Each time I participate in debates about what we women can do together, they always a beginning of something new. I hope this will be also the case of your meeting and as a follow up you will be able to launch a new flagship project on gender and ICT.

Perhaps some of you read in your childhood, or maybe later in life, a sequel to „*Alice in Wonderland*” titled „*Through a Looking Glass*”. In that book, Alice ponders what the world is like on the other side of a mirror. And since she is not only a thinker, but also a young woman of action, she climbs up the fireplace, pokes at the mirror that hangs

behind it, and then she finds herself in an alternative world, the Looking-Glass Land. She enters a sunny garden, in which the flowers gifted in human speech look at her as „ *a flower that can move about*”. And then Alice meets the Red Queen and she is stunned at how fast the Queen can move around. The Queen then reveals to her that the space is divided into squares on the pattern of a huge chessboard and gives her a chance to advance her position to becoming a queen herself if she can move all the way to a certain point in a chess match. Alice, by boarding a special train jumps over to that place by advancing two spaces at once. Are the resource centres such a special train?

Why do I retell to you this very well-known tale that was born in the wonderful imagination of Lewis Carroll? Does it have any connection with the more mundane things like regional growth, Baltic Sea strategy, Europe 2020 or the flagships projects in ICT?

I remember one speech given at the Nordic Conference on Women’s Entrepreneurship and Regional Development in October 2007 here in Stockholm, at which I also had a possibility to present my views. The speaker, Mrs. Tarja Cronberg, Finnish Minister for Employment said that when we speak about innovations, the first picture that comes into our mind is that of „*large and fascinating technology or science parks with tall men in their black suits*”. It is true that this picture less and less realistic, but it still forms a powerful underlying narrative and our perceptions of innovation, of how a „scientist” or an „innovator” looks like. Women in the field of ICT, even if they do a ground-breaking discovery, most of the time work within this „male” narrative. And if we are gathered here to give a new perspective on gender equality,

especially in the ICT sector of our economies, it would be helpful if we could form a new narrative that would give women a strength and even a thrill of finding out of a sudden, like Alice did, that world does not have to look like it always did. That in fact there is an alternative world, in which we can move around with the speed of light and advance two moves at once, unburdened by conventional thinking and the dominating gender patterns. In that world we can all become queens by boarding the „magic train” and winning the global chess game.

.This new narrative, a very powerful narrative of freedom and infinite possibilities, can give to every young woman preparing herself for a career in the ICT, or any other innovation-demanding field, an unshakable conviction that life-changing innovation can start in the mind of a single woman. Such a conviction can be an incredible spur to individual achievement and success.

We know that this narrative of power and singular courage is not, in case of women, enough. At some point even the most motivated woman can collide with the society's perceptions and expectations, in other words with that famous glass-ceiling (which I prefer to call it by its real name: a thick layer of men). In the Report of the conference of October 2007 there are many interesting findings – one of them struck me in a particular way: a group of young Swedish women just establishing themselves in their new occupation in the ICT area, after a year of coaching were expected to be „*strong and resolute*”, in the Report's words. Instead, they „*regarded themselves as inexperienced and ignorant, unsure of themselves and with vague perceptions of what to expect of working life.*” Many well educated young women considered themselves equal with men, but when they had to compete with them, they fell

behind. They also had a tendency to subordinate to men in situations when they did not understand the codes in their workplaces that were usually not gender-neutral. Many of them had also encountered an open male opposition when entering traditionally male-dominated occupations. The research I mention was done in Sweden, but this is obviously not a case particular to one country.

This is why, like Alice in a Looking-Glass Land, women in Europe need to board the 'magic train' that will augment their intrinsic power with its own steam. In fact, this train is already at the station waiting for willing passengers. I am speaking of course of the Women Resource Centres all over Europe, and of all the projects that are under way within the framework of WINNET. Your work is of inestimable value for the future. Empowering women as participants in the labour market, entrepreneurs, inventors, innovators and creators of the new economy is a matter of not only rightful equality, but also of the long-term growth and sustainability of the European economy as a whole. The Strategy of 2020, a 'mix bag' of various initiatives, is unfortunately lacking when it comes to so called 'woman factor'. On one hand, it notices the problem of underemployment of women, it advocates gender equality as means to increase labour force. It also promotes, on the states level, ideas that could help women to better connect work and family life, like the adoption of the life-long learning principle, including flexible learning pathways between different education and training sectors and levels, a work-life balance and increase in gender equality. On the other hand, there is no mention of women in the Flagship program 'Innovation Union'. This is why I am wholeheartedly supporting the proposed outcome of this gathering, namely the formation of the 'Flagship project Gender and ICT', to be developed in 2011. In the light of findings concerning the status of women in non-

traditional technology jobs that I mentioned above, this initiative is needed and necessary like oxygen. Innovation, information, communication – this is something at which women excel. We have practiced skills needed in these areas of human activity for centuries.

Because of these specific qualities of women, we would also need to redefine somewhat the notion of innovation itself. „Innovation”, „innovative approaches” do not equal technology or material production only. Those terms ought to refer in an equal degree to the ability to form new patterns of cooperation in society, to doing something for the cause of intergenerational solidarity, to working for creation of a vibrant civil society and a „life-forming” and „life-advancing „ environment, especially in the context of the threat of climate change. In other words, social innovation should be treated on pair with technological innovation. ICT, in its most technical part, should form a life-supporting system for the growing sectors of our economy connected with the incoming demographic changes and the demands of sustainable growth. In the new economy of the XXI century labour market, social services and domestic arrangements are no longer separate entities – they should be mutually supporting each other in a *virtuous circle*. Both technological and social innovations should feed off each other with constant information feedbacks and resource exchange. For this purpose, we ought to take up innovative concepts like clusters and think how they could be used for building the world-class project of social and cultural infrastructure, like care for the elderly, urban youth apprenticeship or even literacy projects, etc. This is the way in which local, often underfunded, geographically scattered projects could become a part of a European-wide network of „*clusters of hope*”.

The Baltic Sea region is probably the best place in Europe to think about combining the technological and social innovation. According to the data assembled by the European Investment Bank, of the 21 of the most innovative regions in terms of R&D intensity, 7 are to be found in two countries: Sweden and Finland. Also Denmark is significantly above the EU average in this respect. When it comes to the new members, Estonia is leading the pack of the 10 countries that became members in 2004. The region, according to the Communication by the European Commission, is „a highly heterogeneous area in economic, environmental and cultural terms, yet the countries concerned share many common resources and demonstrate considerable interdependence”. Such a concentration of talent means and infrastructure presents a unique opportunity for this region to become a model macroregion, when concrete projects and action plans can achieve a „fast track” application through strong Triple or Quadruple helix networks in public-private partnerships, thematic focus and increased added value in regional concentration of innovation.

The Baltic Sea Strategy is so promising because its flagship projects and strategic actions are based on what is already emerging in the region, namely the Baltic Sea Region „brand”, based on "smartness" in research, innovation, application and cooperation.

When I spoke a moment ago of the Europe-wide network of ‘clusters of hope’, my conviction is that they could be patterned on the ScanBalt Bioregion, one of the most successful leading cluster collaboration that introduced in 2004 the sustainability principle combining all fields of life sciences: health, nutrition, energy, environment. In Europe we need more cross-sectoral reference projects for innovation of this type,

not only in the health and life sciences, but also in social innovation when it comes to education, reducing the cultural deprivation of certain groups, or challenging issues like changing demographics of our societies or migrations.

Let me say that in my opinion, management of social changes, of human aspirations and hopes will become one of the sources of growth in our economy in this century. The era of mass-production is over. It means that we are entering a different stage of growth, not only based on *sustainability but also on sensitivity*. In the world where one university degree is not enough, perhaps most economists or ICT workers would have to gain another degree in psychology in order to be able to direct the stream of social innovation. What would be needed would be social imagination, ability to make technology „people-oriented” to meet individual needs and aspirations. Women can develop a comparative advantage in this field.

We are living in a time of many changes in our economy, our domestic lives and also in global affairs. President Obama said „Yes, we can”- but sometimes the fact that we can do something does not mean that this is easy. No change is painless. I cannot refrain from sharing with you my favourite quotation about structural change. In 1829 a governor of the state of New York wrote to then president Andrew Jackson the following letter: „ *The canal system of this country is being threatened by the spread of a new form of transportation known as „railroads”...If canal boats are supplanted by railroads, serious unemployment will result. Captains, cooks, drivers, repairmen and lock-tenders will be left without means of livehood... As you may well know, Mr. President, „railroad” carriages are pulled at the enormous speed of 15 miles per hour by „engines” which, in addition to endangering life and limb of passengers, roar and*

*snort their way through the countryside, setting fire to crops, scaring the livestock and frightening women and children. The Almighty certainly never intended that people should travel at such breakneck speed".* Of course, we can have a good laugh now at the poor governor's expense, but his anguish and disbelief about the speed of change he observed were quite sincere. I think that we are actually at a very similar moment in human development, when we look around us sometimes with equal astonishment. We know, or at least we suspect, that we will have to considerably change our living habits.

As Catalan economist Santiago Nino Becerra writes in his book *„El crash del 2020"*, we are at the threshold of epochal change in our thinking when it comes to the model of economic development. The reality will force even the unwilling to change the habits of consumption. We know today, for example, that in 65 years we will not have uranium any more. We will thus be much more careful about our ways of consumption and production and the way we deal with what the Earth gives us. According to Becerra, making more, producing more will become an obsolete way of thinking and doing. We will be producing only what is really necessary and sustainable. As he writes *"Nobody in his right mind will want to buy to his or her home 60 tv sets, even if they would only be priced at 1 euro."* We will also have to redefine some well –known concepts, like employment and unemployment. Many of our labour market policies were conceived in the very different economic context of the 1950s and 1960s. They do not respond easily to the needs of rapid and flexible adaptation to changing circumstances. What we need to protect is the *capacity to change*. In such a new picture, economy will be increasingly becoming more of a *relational enterprise*, be built around creative industries and cultural sector in general

– what is actually noted in the Fast Track Strategic Action of the Baltic Sea Strategy under the heading” *Develop a common Baltic Sea Region strategy to promote service innovation*”. This, by itself, shows that this region is the most attuned to these coming changes and open to the future. I would even venture to say that the Baltic Sea region, thanks to a multidimensional Baltic Sea strategy and the attitude of cooperation, can be called a leader in Europe’s march to a new frontier of innovation.

To conclude, let me say something about the connection of women and development. The Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman in his manifold writings warns us against the formation of the two categories of citizens: ‘*the global;*’- highly skilled workers – the winners in the knowledge economy and „*the local*’, - unskilled, excluded from the formal economy – the losers in the process of globalization. I would somewhat modify, or refine the Bauman’s definition when it comes to women. The fact is that for a very, very long time, the majority of women were considered as „local citizens”, even if they were highly skilled and more resilient to adapt to the demands of the world beyond their traditional „place”. The ‘global citizen’ was usually male, even if he had lower level of education and less transferable social skills. In the new emerging era, if we want to develop our societies and to ensure a sustainable growth we have to do everything that all our citizens become „global”. We need all the human capital that we can get. And human capital, it is worth of remembering, does not have gender as such. Only those who want to exclude, to stigmatize a large portion of society, still think of gender as something that is a reason to erect barriers. To me, what is especially appealing in the Baltic Sea region is that it is making a conscious effort, on the level of the European Commission, states, the regional authorities, the civil society. Let's use the Baltic Sea Strategy to do away with the old

prejudices, to take women up from that status of „local citizen” and to prepare them to become winners in the global chess games. In the alternative Looking-Glass Land Alice could without much effort jump two spaces at once. In as much as the real world, though, can resemble a fable, I think that Baltic Sea Region women, with a bit more effort, can do more.

Thank you for your attention.