

Subject: Disrespectful behaviour towards woman of colour at the EDDs and need for effective prevention and redress mechanisms

Dear Ms Urpilainen,

(CC: Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission; Helena Dalli, European Commissioner for Equality; Reinhard Bütikofer, Member of the European Parliament; Ilze Juhansone, Secretary General, European Commission; Klaus Welle, Secretary General, European Parliament; Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament; Vula Tsetsi, Secretary General, Greens/EFA; Ska Keller, Co-President, Greens/EFA; Phillipe Lamberts, Co-President, Greens/EFA; Ricarda Lang, Co-leader, Die Grünen; and Omid Nouripour, Co-leader, Die Grünen.)

The undersigned organisations and individuals bring to your attention our concerns regarding the unacceptable behaviour of a member of the European Parliament at an Agora event at the European Development Days (EDDs) hosted by two civil society organisations, Eurodad and Counter Balance.¹ While this letter is based on this one instance of misconduct, it reflects a systemic pattern of behaviour that is not isolated to one individual or EU institution. We hope that in calling your attention to this issue, immediate action and more structured measures will be put in place to prevent such behaviour from repeating itself.

The reaction of Mr. Bütikofer MEP to the concluding remarks of the host, Ms Jean Saldanha, the Director of Eurodad was very disrespectful. This unacceptable behaviour is aggravated by the fact that Ms Saldanha is a woman of colour.

As organisations that prioritise and work hard to ensure the respect, protection and strengthening of women's rights, with a holistic and intersectional approach, we stand by the European Commission's - and Ms Von der Leyen's commitment to achieve a 'Union of equality'.

We note that the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-25 states that "[i]nclusive and diverse leadership is needed to solve the complex challenges that decision-makers face today. More inclusion and more diversity is essential to bring forward new ideas and innovative approaches that better serve a dynamic and flourishing EU society. Allowing citizens from all backgrounds to meaningfully participate in society is a necessary precondition for a well-functioning democracy and leads to more effective policy-making."

European legal frameworks including Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, Article 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Communication on the A Union of equality: EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025 and the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC), address equality between men and women and persons, with the latter specifically addressing women as victims of multiple discrimination.

We consider that Mr. Bütikofer, in his behaviour, demonstrated a blatant lack of respect for these core values and legal frameworks promoting inclusion and equality. In addition, his comments demonstrated a disregard for civil society's role as a critical guardian of transparency and accountability. We are particularly compelled to act and stand in solidarity with Ms Jean Saldanha, who, as one of the few women of colour in a leadership role in Brussels, was treated so disrespectfully. At the same time that this incident took place at the EDDs, Ms Vula Tsetsi, Secretary General of the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament hosted the group's civil society day and explicitly called out European politicians excluding or dismissing expertise from the global south, persons of colour and women.

¹ *The EU's Global Gateway: market creation or international development?* took place on Tuesday 21 June at the European Development Days. Further information about the event is [available here](#) and a video of the incident is [available here](#).

There are many more instances of similarly disrespectful behaviour towards women in various spaces involving EU institutions and bodies in Brussels. In particular when women demonstrate their agency, express a difference of opinion or are simply outspoken.

We believe that systematic efforts on the part of EU institutions and bodies to prevent such behaviour and redress it when it occurs is long overdue.

We call for immediate and visible action to be taken, to bring the unacceptability of his actions to the attention of Mr. Bütikofer and to take measures to prevent their recurrence and for Ms. Saldanha to be informed of the actions taken. This must include training to understand the challenges and issues of intersectionality, equality of women's participation and leadership and issues of unconscious bias.

Moreover, given the systematic nature of the problem, we believe that EU institutions and bodies must develop a structural plan for mandatory unconscious bias training of all EU institutions and bodies' office holders and civil servants on these issues.

Additionally, we call for clear codes of conduct for all EU events to be instituted for prevention, reporting and redress of harassment, discrimination or disrespect of women, as well as other forms of discrimination, addressing the full intersectionality of the issue. There are numerous best practices of policies and codes of conduct which we would be happy to share. Experts from civil society, including women of colour, must be engaged in the drafting of such codes of conducts. Such a code of conduct should be clearly published and explicitly shared with all organisers and speakers.

We hope that this incident will trigger the start of a deep and structural transformation in which representatives of all EU institutions and bodies respect women in their full intersectionality and promote their equality in leadership and participation. We stand ready to work closely with you in this endeavour.

Yours sincerely,

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