Message by President von der Leyen on the occasion of the International Women's Day

Brussels, 8 March 2024

My parents taught me that men and women are different, yet equal.

But when I was a little girl, women did not have equal rights.

A woman who wanted to work had to ask for her husband's permission. And the husband could terminate her contract, if he believed that she was neglecting her housewife duties. It wasn't until I was a student that women in my country conquered the right to sign their own contract. And then we had to fight to turn our equal rights into reality.

Now fast-forward to 2024. Today women are scientists, CEOs and soldiers. Women are football players and Nobel prize winners. For the first time in our Union's history – we have four women at the helm of the European Parliament, the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the European Investment Bank.

And in the last five years, we have taken unprecedented action for women's rights in Europe. We have cast into law a basic principle: that equal work deserves equal pay. Because there is no single reason why a woman should be paid less than a man. We have unblocked legislation that was stuck for ten years, to get more women on boards of big European firms. Because there are so many qualified women who can reach the top. And we have pushed through the first-ever European law to end violence against women.

Because there can be no equality without freedom from violence. But the path to full equality is still long. It requires attention and commitment, every day, from each and every one of us.

So that the next generation of women can finally get what they deserve: a world of equal rights and opportunities, for all.

Happy Women's day.

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