

Women's Rights



Marina Yannakoudakis
MEP

Women's Rights Spokesman

Fighting discrimination, supporting women in business and SMEs and combating violence and abuse while allowing women to make life choices best suited for themselves: this is the work of the Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee in the European Parliament

London MEP Marina Yannakoudakis is the Conservative Spokesman on Women's Rights and Gender Equality in the European Parliament. Marina is committed to tackling all forms of discrimination while balancing the Women's Rights Committee's repeated calls for more women's rights in the acknowledgement that going too far legislatively can, in fact, be detrimental to women. She wants a good deal for women and a good deal for business, and works to fight EU red tape which would be burdensome for the economy.

Marina led the charge against the European Parliament's proposal for a fully-paid maternity leave of at least 20 weeks. She warned that the plans would actually damage the job prospects of young women, with small businesses in particular thinking twice before employing them. The over-reaching, expensive and unnecessary proposals would have cost the UK taxpayer £2.5 billion per year. They have been blocked thanks to Marina's revelation of their high costs by an impact assessment. Conservatives believe that the EU is not the place to make social and employment policy laws, which are the responsibility of national governments, and will continue to fight unnecessary employment legislation like the EU Maternity Leave Directive.

Marina has also been a strong opponent of the European Commission's plans to introduce quotas for women on company boards. We need more women on corporate boards and need to achieve a better gender balance at all management levels, but quotas send out the message that women can't make it on merit and they certainly shouldn't be set at the EU level. Some Member States have their own quotas, but in the UK women are already making it to the top under their own steam. Last year saw the largest ever annual increase in the percentage of women on boards. The UK is already on course to exceed a voluntary target of 25%, even achieving 30% of women on boards in four years.

With so much untapped business potential in the UK and the EU, Marina has spearheaded the issue of female entrepreneurship through the European Parliament. As a mother and a businesswoman she knows exactly how hard setting up a small business can be. Marina drafted a report which called for women to have fair access to start-up and expansion grants, and to target women with the right information – including through mentorship schemes. We need a new generation of women entrepreneurs who can juggle their own aspirations to succeed alongside commitment to their family. David Cameron agrees and is



Marina in Strasbourg standing up for the UK's right to control its own employment legislation



Marina is working to safeguard children from exploitation on the internet

promoting a new scheme to fund 5,000 mentors for female entrepreneurs who want to start or grow their own business.

Marina is working on shaping the EU's Competitiveness of Enterprises and SMEs (COSME) 2014-2020 programme which will facilitate access for women to finance for small businesses, and encouraging an entrepreneurial culture amongst women. She was recently invited to speak on women entrepreneurs and other initiatives to support female entrepreneurs at the prestigious OECD Forum in Paris.

Marina has worked to safeguard children from exploitation on the Internet. While child protection is fundamentally the responsibility of the UK, online grooming knows no borders and we need to work together to combat the appalling sexual exploitation of children. Last year, Marina played a major role in shaping the EU Directive on combating the sexual abuse, sexual exploitation of children and child pornography. She put forward a number of practical and forward-looking suggestions based on the "3 Ps": Prevention, Protection and Prosecution. Marina believes that everything should be done to stop people accessing illegal images of children by blocking and bringing down these websites.

Thousands of women are trafficked into the UK each year; many of them are forced into

prostitution. Marina has worked to ensure that women who were the victims of human trafficking are given the help and support they need to rebuild their lives. She worked with her colleague Timothy Kirkhope MEP on the EU Human Trafficking Directive. The UK has an excellent record on fighting human trafficking, and by sharing best practice the EU can help protect vulnerable women from organised criminal gangs.

Domestic violence is also a key area Marina has worked

on, with initiatives such as the new European Protection Order (EPO) which safeguards victims of stalking and domestic violence to ensure that a person who has obtained legal protection, typically issued in cases of domestic violence, will not lose it because of a move to another Member State. It will be based on a system of mutual recognition and effectively make protection orders portable across Europe.

Marina has campaigned to end the barbaric practice of female genital mutilation (FGM). Genital cutting is a social norm in parts of Africa, the Middle East and South-East Asia. The diaspora communities in Europe are continuing the practice even though it is illegal in a number of EU countries, including the United Kingdom. In London it is estimated that 6,000 girls a year, some as young as ten, are at risk from this cruel and unnecessary practice.

As an advocate against all forms of violence, Marina is highlighting issues affecting the developing world. Following on from FGM she recently brought the issue of "corrective rape" to the attention of the European Parliament by raising awareness of acts of violence against African women on the basis of their sexual orientation.

For more information on Marina's work on the Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee see: www.marinayannakoudakis.com