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Dear Ms Centioni,

Thank you for your e-mail transmitting the first conclusions of the Women's European Council, adopted on 21 March 2018.

The conclusions express the Women's European Council concerns over the gender gap and slow progress towards gender equality in the EU. Let me assure you that the European Commission fully shares these concerns. The reality today is that the gender gap in employment has stagnated at around 11 percentage points. The economic loss due to this gap amounts to 370 billion euro per year, i.e. to 2.8% of the EU gross domestic product. Women's empowerment is therefore not only a question of equality. It is an economic necessity.

Women, who make up 50% of our population and are often better educated, still earn on average 16% less than men across the EU. This Commission has therefore made addressing the gender pay gap one of its key priorities under the Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019, and in November 2017 we adopted a comprehensive action plan to address the root causes of the pay gap.

Another crucial instrument towards achieving gender equality in the EU is the initiative to support work-life balance for working parents and carers, which we put forward in April 2017. The directive proposed under the initiative would allow both men and women to better balance their working life with family responsibilities. We count on the European Women Alliance support in having the measures proposed in the initiative adopted and implemented.

Ms Alessia CENTIONI
President
European Women Alliance (EWA)

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As for women's empowerment in decision-making, inequalities persist. In particular, women continue to struggle against long-held and systemic entry barriers into political and corporate leadership positions. This is not only an issue of equal rights and fairness for women. Women's under-representation in decision-making positions is a clear waste of human capital. On this the Commission tries to lead by example, moving towards meeting the target of at least 40% of women middle and senior managers by the end of the current mandate – we are currently at 37%.

In 2012 the Commission put forward a legislative proposal aiming to improve transparency of the selection of board directors in the largest listed companies. The proposal would ensure that women represent at least 40% of non-executive directors. As you know, the adoption of the proposal is pending before the European Parliament and the Council, as the Member States did not yet reach agreement in the Council. We will continue our efforts to unblock the proposal including working closely with Council Presidencies to find a compromise on the text.

These are examples of some of the measures that the Commission is undertaking to promote gender equality in the Union. I look forward to Women's European Council's action plan and its proposals to further promote gender equality.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'A' followed by a long horizontal stroke that tapers to the right.