

Alona Lebedieva, head of Ukraine's AURUM Group talks to EU Today on gender equality and Ukraine's accession to the EU

BRUSSELS, BELGIUM, April 7, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Alona Lebedieva is the owner and Head of Supervisory Board at the Kyiv based [Aurum Group](#), a leading Ukrainian diversified industrial and investment group with more than 1500 employees.

She is a graduate of the Kyiv Institute of International Relations, holds a Master's degree in international economics and is a strong advocate for change in both the political arena and the workplace, where too often women are discriminated against.



Alona Lebedieva, head of Ukraine's AURUM Group

Following a recent press conference at [Brussels Press Club](#), Alona agreed to an [interview with EU Today](#).

“

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Q: Concerning the “glass ceiling.” In both private and public sectors of Ukraine, what is the ratio between men and women at boardroom level?

“To compare Ukraine with many countries the situation in Ukraine isn't so deplorable. But Ukraine still has significant room for development in the context of women rights, especially given our ambition to join the EU.

“Regarding the indicators: the ratio of men and women occupying the top positions in Ukrainian politics and

business becomes closer year by year. Today 1/3 of Ukrainian deputies are women, twice higher than in 2014. But the number of women who received their mandate by a majority system is far

less.

The situation in big business is, however, worse. According to statistical data the number of business women is 16 times less than men. Mostly women are running small enterprises, but I'm absolutely sure that the women's power and potential is highly underestimated: but this will change."

Q: Historically, advances in Women's Rights are made after a major conflict. For example, universal suffrage was achieved in Europe in two waves: the first after WW1, then again after WW2. What are your expectations for Ukraine, and particularly for Ukrainian women following the end of the war?



The talented team of fellow thinkers gathered under the banner of Aurum Group sets itself ambitious objectives and successfully achieves them.

"I believe that the Ukrainian woman is extremely strong, and I'm certain that the war has pushed awareness at all levels of the importance of involving Ukrainian woman in the post-war development and growth of our country.

"Significant changes are to take place. There are many spheres which were considered as masculine until recently, but now we can now clearly see a change of mood. For instance, Ukrainian women in the army. Today more than 60,000 women serve in our country's armed forces, a figure 2.5 times higher than in 2014."

Q: Generally speaking, is there equality in earnings for men and women in Ukraine?

"There are not and never have been any salary differences of men and women in my company, Aurum group. But generally the situation in Ukraine is worse: Ukrainian official statistical data shows the gap is 18%.

"However, here we can also report some positive changes, because this gap was a staggering 30% just 10 years ago."

Q: Do you feel that following the end of the current conflict Ukrainian civil society is prepared to push for greater equality of status for women in the boardroom and also in the political arena?

"Undoubtedly. Many changes are taking place before our eyes. I completely agree that the role of women at all levels is truly undervalued, especially by people of the soviet generation.

"Looking carefully at the business environment we can state it as fact that most women have traditionally occupied so-called service positions. In my opinion, the main reason for that is the stereotypes, the foundation of which were laid in soviet or postwar childhood, when a woman's place was defined by the kitchen or her husband.

"Unfortunately, Ukraine was no exception. I, being an owner and CEO of industrial group of companies, had to walk this path and put a lot of effort into overcoming these stereotypes."

Q: Do you see a window of opportunity during Ukraine's EU accession process to the EU to push for such legislation as may be required to achieve a level playing field?

"If we want to become an EU member state, we have to adapt our legal system to meet EU standards, and the issue of equal rights between men and women will be a priority for Ukraine.

"I can assure that serious work is being done in this direction, even now, when the country is at war. Our government is legislating initiatives that can and will help to adjust our standards in this area to those of the EU.

"In particular, I would draw attention to the state strategy for Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men which was approved in Summer 2022. According to this strategy, equal rights must be guaranteed in all economical spheres. I believe that this document is extremely important and its acceptance was pushed by our ambition to join the EU."

Q: How could the EU pressure Kyiv to bring employment practices up to EU standards?

"In my view, the employment issue should be integrated into the legislation package for joining EU. It will be a powerful lever, because everybody understands that joining EU is our strategic goal.

"I believe, absolutely, that Ukraine must orient its practices towards EU standards. We do not have any other alternative to joining the EU."

Q: Do the Ukrainian political elite understand the institutional reforms that EU accession will require?

"The Ukrainian political elite desired accession to the EU for a long period of time now, and I hope they realise how close this moment could become.

"Nowadays they have to accept that they must refuse corruption and understand that soon we will be working under EU legislation."

Q: Do you yourself have any concerns about Ukraine's aspirations to join the EU?

"In general, in Ukraine the complicated but important process of the final rejection of the soviet economic model is not yet fully complete. I believe that thanks to the foreign investors this can be overcome faster.

"By the time Ukraine joins the EU we will face other challenges. But I am totally sure that we will cope with them. Ukrainians have significant potential, we have great technical specialists, we are ready for modernisation of our production and we are constantly working on it."

Gary Cartwright

EU Today

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