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Varadkar welcomes breakthrough on LGBTI & gender rights at EU level.

Minister expresses regret that LGBTI proposal was watered down before being accepted

Minister for Social Protection Leo Varadkar has welcomed a breakthrough at EU level on a proposed Directive on gender and LGBTI Equality but expressed regret that the LGBTI component had to be watered down before being accepted.

The Minister is attending today's meeting of the EU's Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council in Luxembourg. The proposed EU Directive would extend the protection against discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation to areas outside of employment including social security and healthcare, education, and access to goods and services including housing.

While the proposals for gender equality were accepted, some members had expressed reservations about the LGBTI proposals. However at the conclusion Minister Varadkar said the agreed proposals still represent an important step for LGBTI rights.

Minister Varadkar told the Council that: **"Ireland would like to commend the Dutch presidency for its hard work in attempting to bring this joint package of council conclusions on LGBTI equality and also gender equality to completion. Ireland strongly supports the council conclusions on gender equality. In relation to LGBTI equality we wish to be associated with our Swedish, Danish, Austrian and Belgian friends in regretting that it was watered down, but nonetheless the agreed wording does represent real progress on a trans-European level.**

"The founding principles of the union are that respect for equality among all people and respect for human rights should be paramount. Ireland as you know has made huge strides in recent years to bring about equality for all its LGBTI people. Last year we were the first country in the world to vote in a referendum to establish a constitutional right to marriage equality which extends to other aspects of family law. And we hope other countries follow suit in due course, while respecting their sovereign right to make their own decisions.

"Around the world LGBTI people face enormous discrimination, in Russia, in the Middle East, in Africa in particular. Even in a western country like the United States, we saw the events in Orlando unfold last week and I want to join with everyone else in extending our condolences and thoughts and prayers to those who were killed and injured and their families and friends, and particularly add to that message of defiance that none of us should ever allow hatred, or terrorism, or homophobia, or any form of hate crime to force us to change the way that we live our lives. As leaders of the EU, we need to send out a clear message to the world that LGBTI people are equal, safe, respected, and protected in our countries, and included in our countries, and should be all over the world."

ENDS

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