

Perspectives for the Women- and Gender Equality Policies

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Anna Karamanou, PhD

PES Women Vice-President

The history of women's rights in Greece is quite recent. It was not until 1952, when women were awarded voting rights and the first woman was elected as member of the Parliament, in 1953. The recognition of women's political and human rights were followed by a massive participation in education and in economic activities, changes in gender roles and in family structures. There is no doubt, that over the years, the change in women's role and their conversion from a domestic to a significant economic entity, has been extraordinary. Greece's entry into the European Community in 1981, contributed to the development of a solid legal basis upon which equality could be sufficiently established. However, despite the political will, guided by the provisions of the European Union, there are still problematic areas for the application of the progressive Greek legislation in daily life and practice.

Today Greek women can be very proud of the fact that more than 60% of the students in the

Greek Universities are female, whilst at the same time we can observe women's dynamic breakthrough in all scientific and vocational fields. It is noteworthy that where procedures are objective and meritocratic (as in the educational system) women usually triumph. In the judiciary 75% of the newcomers are women and the same applies in the services sector. It is interesting to note that the proportion of employed women with higher and postgraduate education is higher than that of men. In the sector of art and cultural inheritance the presence of women is especially strong. Women archaeologists are in the majority in this field and reach the highest ranks. The presence of women is also significant in the restoration of monuments and in managerial positions as well. In the past few years, the heads of the national museums have been women and they have managed to receive important European awards for the organization and operation of museums.

In assessing the presence of women in cultural and academic life, it can be seen that it is continuous and substantial, despite the problems faced by women in Greek society in general and in the recognition of their professional, academic and artistic qualifications in particular. The problem is that the apparent increase in women's participation in educational, cultural and economic life has neither accompanied by a redistribution of family care responsibilities, nor by the representation of women in democratic institutions and the political decision-making process.

Participation of women in politics remains very low and does not follow the progress achieved in other areas. Political reality today denotes a serious deficit in terms of democracy, as women, the majority of the Greek electorate, is either a minority or absent from the political decision-making process altogether. Greece ranks near

the bottom among the 28 countries of the European Union, in terms of gender empowerment, and 91st, among 142 countries, according to the classification of the World Economic Forum (2014 ranking).

The results of the 2015 parliamentary elections show 69 women out of 300 seats (23%), which is the historical high. At the local elections of 2014, the results were even more disappointing. Only 15 women mayors were elected out of a total of 325 and two women heads of regions in totally 13 administrative regions. The case of the municipality of Athens is a worth mentioning exception, because a gender balance is applied to all levels: The president of the Council is a woman, as well as half of the 10 vice mayors and half of the municipality Council.

The situation is deplorable concerning social partners. At the last congress of the General Confederation of Trade Unions, not even one woman was elected for the presidium and only one at the 15member Executive Committee. The same picture occurs in all employers organizations. Working women's interests are not represented. The social partners' organizations have proved the most hostile regime towards women's rights and gender equilibrium. No significant progress since 19th century.

Quota system and the compulsory representation of women in the electoral lists remains a subject raising a great deal of controversy among different parties. At the same time the "patriarchal" structures of political parties, the electoral system with the preference vote and fierce competition between the candidates, as well as the unequal distribution of family responsibilities, are factors discouraging women from participating in public life. Furthermore, wage and earning differentials

seem to have a negative effect upon women's decision to participate in politics.

At the same time, the economic crisis, is used, in many cases, to accelerate direct and indirect discrimination and inequality in the labour market and rocket unemployment rates, especially for young women. Women's unemployment has reached 29,6% compared to the 23,3% of men and among youth, 15–24 years, unemployment has rocketed to 51,5% with young women to 56,9% (March 2015). To this sad picture you should add inadequate childcare and elderly care provisions, domestic violence and sexual harassment, the portrayal of distorted stereotypes by the mass media and the still prevailing double standards for men and women.

The Greek welfare state can be described as a traditional type of Southern European welfare regime, with its disproportionate spending on pension protection and, by contrast, its relatively limited capacity to protect women and men from basic social risks, particularly unemployment and long-term unemployment. It is within this welfare arrangement that the importance of the family as a welfare provider remains very important. Women have actually exempted the state from its responsibility to provide care for children and the elderly and women themselves have undertaken the functions and duties of the welfare state, resulting in the perpetuation of inequalities between men and women. The Greek pension system has been a characteristic case of unreasonable, increasing and unbearable burden in the Greek state expenses. Therefore it is regarded as a key test case for the success of efforts under way to put the country's finances in order and also to facilitate women's access to labour market on an equal footing with men.

These problems are all dialectically connected to the male-centered culture, which prohibits in many direct and indirect ways participation of women in economic and political power structures and persists in the labour divisions between men and women. It is obvious that the old Athenian belief, from Pericles time, "The City belongs to men", still remains strong today constituting the basic principle of the structure and the operation of the Greek social and political system.

To these hurdles we can add the outdated religious traditions of the region and discriminatory symbolisms, like the ban on women visiting the Mount Athos –the Holy Mountain with the 20 monasteries – an extreme case of gender-based discrimination against women, backed by a state penal law. The European Parliament has twice decided on a resolution against the ban. However, this tradition still stays long and still remains a taboo in public discourse, supported by both men and women.

Laws on trafficking and combating domestic violence were passed and despite their drawbacks and criticisms from the part of NGOs these laws are the first to classify trafficking among actions of organized crime and also penalize domestic violence and sexual harassment. There are more than 70 non-governmental women's organizations in Greece which offer a decisive contribution to elevating the status of women by lobbying, organizing seminars, events, conferences, actions in support of women victims of violence and trafficking, providing services free of charge, such as legal advice, psychological support and defense at courts.

Minority and immigrant women constitute an area that requires particular attention, as women of these categories are very often deprived of

the most basic rights. In the political sphere, the "Political Association of Women", established in 1998 by representatives and prominent figures from all Greek political parties -except for the Communist Party-, is fighting for enhancing women's participation in political life and decision-making process.

Evaluating the achievements and the changes that have taken place within the last fifty years, Greek women feel duly justified, despite the fact that problems have by no means been adequately solved. Greece, located at the southeastern end of Europe, with a history of 400 years under the Ottoman yoke, away from the central European political stage, was the late recipient of modernization and enlightenment and this has had its impact upon women's position in society. Reality in everyday life shows that there is a long way to go until true gender equality is achieved and efforts must be made to encourage further promotion of women's rights and equal opportunities. However, a strong feminist movement is missing. Cultural transformation and change in mentalities is a process that takes time, but it can certainly be accelerated by political will and concerted actions by women, within the framework of civil society, at European and National level.

Beyond issues related to gender equality, our societies in SE Europe are facing serious political developments related to great losses of our socialdemocratic political parties and the rise of Conservative, nationalistic and ultra right parties (NeoNazis in Greece), threatening our democratic institutions and stability in the region. At the late 1990s, when I was member of the European Parliament, 13 out of the 15 countries of EU had socialdemocratic governments, who shaped the European political agenda. Now we are witnessing the rise of Le Pen in France and the great victory of the

Tories in UK's last elections. Both statistics and political science show that Socialdemocracy in EU is currently undergoing the most serious crisis since its foundation.

Under the current financial crisis, the rocketing unemployment and the rise of the far right, the situation of women in EU is under threat. The right, historically, has always been hostile towards feminism and equal rights. Since these values lie at the core of socialdemocratic theory and practice, the socialist parties must keep supporting women's organizations and join forces with PES Women to eliminate unequal gender hierarchies, deconstruct patriarchy, achieve a gender balance in all democratic institutions and a fair share of political power and domestic care. Recent studies have shown that gender inequality is a clear waste of human resources and has a high political, economic and social cost.

Women should play a very important role in renewing and empowering socialdemocratic ideals, as they have done many times in the past. Feminists have always been very active in the region, although their initiatives and rights have been persistently undermined by the Balkan/Mediterranean/Patriarchal culture. We should not forget the plethora of initiatives for peace and cooperation in the 1990s: the *Win Balkans* project, the Athens Conference for peace, the initiatives within the framework of the *Stability Pact*, the *National Parliaments initiatives and networks*, the sharing of good practices, methods and Know-how, the excellent work carried out by the *CEE Network*.

Nowadays we possess the knowledge and the experience. The best way to achieve our goals is to convince and mobilize women to make use of their powers to transform this region and make it a better place to live, work and prosper.

Ideas – perspectives:

1. Insist on the gender perspective, in finding solutions to the current problems of financial crisis and the necessary changes to socioeconomic and political architecture of EU, as well as to modernizing our countries' systems.
2. Keep EU united, make the necessary structural changes and mobilize women throughout Europe to regenerate socialdemocratic ideals of equality, social justice, solidarity and a fair distribution of wealth.
3. Combat youth and female unemployment, by investing in human resources, research and innovation, equal opportunities for all and substantial gender equality, in all areas.
4. Support feminist NGOs and fight for a balanced (50/50) participation of women and men in political decision-making, in all democratic institutions and power structures.
5. Focus on male dominance and all kinds of symbolisms in tackling the causes and not only the symptoms of gender inequalities.
6. Integrate gender equality in all analyses and policies – domestic, European and international. Mainstream gender into negotiations with social partners and establish strategies for systematic monitoring and reporting mechanisms.
7. Fight for the implementation of the already existing EU and national legislation on women's rights and gender equality, in all areas and in everyday life.
8. Focus on women's powers and their capabilities to bring great social, political and economic changes.

Finally I would like to stress, what has been our guiding principle in PES Women: a gender based policy should be shaped and formulated on the

basis of equal value of the individuals, equal opportunities, equal rights for men and women, resulting in an equal share of economic, social, political and caring responsibilities.

ANNA KARAMANOU PhD

Political Science, Gender Advocacy

Former MEP

tel: +30-210-7775223

GSM: +30-6944-302328

SYROS: +30-22810-61974

Email: anna@karamanou.gr

www.karamanou.gr