

Promoting inclusion: Gender equality and women in politics (στα αγγλικά)

COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

The Chairperson

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THE RETURN OF POLITICS

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ADDRESS

by Anna Karamanou /MEP-PASOK-GREECE

Dear comrades,

Among the many new elements that make this Congress exceptional, is the dynamic presence of so many prominent women among the delegates and among the speakers. This has never happened before to this extent and I find it a very good sign. A sign of change within S.I. and recognition, at last, of the need to correct gender imbalances, share power and build in partnership a more human society into our new globalized world. There is no doubt that we need to explore new ways of global governance, bridge the global divides, create peaceful and democratic societies, where human life is valued and war is rejected as a means of settling conflicts. I would like to warmly support what

President Lula said, that the only war we can accept is the war against hunger and social exclusion. My political party PASOK in Greece is committed to the cause of peace, good neighbourly relations and dialogue between civilizations.

After having heard so many speakers and read the documents of both Congresses, the SI and the SIW, I feel that we can be optimistic about the future. We have made real progress upon identifying a new political culture, without compromising our fundamental values, and a political platform for global democratic governance. I am especially happy that it has been recognized by so many that none of the problems of our times can ever be adequately addressed without the contribution, the ideas and the political participation of women on an equal footing with men.

Women, as a whole, are historically associated with non violence and their value system is based on dialogue, reconciliation and the settling of differences with peaceful means. This value system can hopefully provide an alternative to the current culture of violence and address the structural causes of conflict, such as the desire for control over natural resources, poverty, nationalism, religious fundamentalism, power manipulation through militarization, abuses of

human rights. In this regard women's inclusion can enrich, expand and transform political agendas at all levels.

It is becoming obvious that globalization and new technologies require the mobilization of the whole population, not just half of it, and the new society of knowledge cannot be viable without the contribution, the creative imagination and the abilities of women. However political reality today, with the bright exception of the

Scandinavian countries, denotes a serious deficit in terms of democracy, as women are either in a minority or absent altogether from the political decision making process.

It is obvious that what the Greek historian Thukydides had written 2.500 years ago, namely

The City Belongs to Men , still remains valid today and constitutes the basic principle of the structure and operation of the political system throughout the world. At the same time, discrimination against women in the labour market, violence and sexual exploitation, the portrayal of distorted stereotypes by the media and the unequal distribution of responsibilities between men and women, are all problems that are dialectically connected to the low participation of women in economic and political power structures.

Womens inclusion in politics has been an issue of high priority for the committee I have the honour to chair the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities of the European Parliament. In view of the forthcoming elections in June 2004, we have taken various initiatives to highlight the need for ensuring gender balance on electoral lists, positive action measures, financing for the empowerment of women, awareness raising and information electoral campaigns aiming at the advantages of parity democracy. Also letters have been sent to party leaders in the European Union and Accession Countries. Party leaders are asked to present gender balanced lists. Today women in the EP count for 31% of the total and our objective remains to reach a balance and not go behind this. This is a message specially sent to several socialist parties of the accession countries which did not include women at all in their lists of observers in the EP.

Our political group in the E.U. makes a very good model, having women 38% of its members

and also a quota of 40% for the members of the bureau. Regarding the quota strategy, it is a question of social justice, when a gentlemen's agreement is not possible. As long as there is no political balance between women and men, the implementation of quota within parties, or appropriate legislation is necessary.

Unfortunately women are invited to play in a power game with rules set by men. Any position taken by a woman is lost by a man, and this provokes tensions and hostility. But is there any other way to promote inclusion of women and achieve parity democracy?

Dear Comrades,

It is about time that all political parties of our political family, everywhere in the world, adopt policies, structures and training programmes, as well as an appropriate electoral system to facilitate women's access to political life.

Women's participation in political decision making is becoming imperative in a world that is deprived of its humanity. It is not just an issue of justice and fair play between men and women. It is above all an issue of social and economic development. Men alone have proved unable to solve the problems and bridge the gaps, the inequalities and uncertainties of today's world. Maybe a good balance of the different qualities of the two sexes of the human species can lead us to a balanced world.

We have to be brave enough to achieve a more balanced and a happier world!