

Women and European Convention (στα αγγλικά)

"WOMEN'S ROLE IN POLITICS IN THE 21st
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Anna KARAMANOOU

**SIW Vice-President-Member of
the European Parliament,
PASOK/GR**

In the beginning of the 21st century, we are faced indeed with a number of challenges. The feeling that we are in the middle of a historical crossroad overwhelms us all. We all feel the need to explore new ways of settling differences, create a more humane society and make an attempt for a fairer distribution of resources, that is, to identify a new political culture. Peace and security, solidarity, social justice, sustainable development and gender equality remain goals, yet to be achieved, as it was the case half a century ago, when the UN were founded. At the same time, it is becoming more and more obvious that governments have not the ability to achieve these goals without the consent and support of people, without the development of a strong sense of solidarity among populations and without any changes taking place in the value systems and ethics. The new millenium has began in a context of economic globalisation, economic prosperity for many and at the same time deepening

inequalities, continued existence of all sorts of violence and scarcity of women in political decision-making that affects all citizens.

The recent developments in our region, such as the tragic aftermath of wars in Yugoslavia and the tragedy caused by the earthquakes in Turkey and Greece, have all brought again into light the issues of cooperation and solidarity among people and nations, while at the same time have touched all those who seek for solutions beyond the classical recipes of traditional politics. **The politics of the 21st century can no longer be the politics of hatred and confrontation.**

Women can have a great contribution to this end.

Greater participation of women in political life is required by the urgent demands for peace, sustainable development, cooperation and solidarity that the 21st century is imposing upon us. For us, that is for Greek and Turkish women this is a great challenge to prove that we can play a protagonistic role towards the consolidation of peace, stability and security in the area of the Balkans, which is of common concern. We, as good neighbours and eventually as partners in Europe, must fight for a higher participation of women in the political arena, as we can actually be agents of change and renewal of politics and society.

Women's participation in politics is getting imperative in a world that is deprived of its humanity. As professor Francis Fukuyama advocated in his article titled "If women ruled the world" : *"It could be certainly predicted that a greater participation of women in politics would lead to a less violent world. Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom and war, may have been the female model in ancient times, however, in the contemporary world, female influence is definitely catalytic against militarism and for peace"*.

To date progress is certainly encouraging. Of all the events that have characterised the 20th century, the transformation of the female world represents the greatest peaceful social revolution. A great deal has been achieved so far, which allows us a little celebration, but there is still a long way to go. The apparent increase in women's participation in educational and economic life were accompanied neither by redistribution of family responsibilities nor by representation of women in democratic institutions and political decision-making process. Real equality has not yet been achieved since women are still poorer and with less power than men, despite an important change in the status, role and contribution of women in society in the second half of the century.

It is a fact that Aristotelian theory of the division into two spheres of life, that is the private and the public, has had a profound impact upon philosophical discourse, political science and traditional values, such as freedom, equality and justice, throughout the centuries. Women are absent from the classical texts of political thought, whilst political analysts up until recently have made no reference to inequalities between men and women in their analyses. Even today, some remain completely silent on these issues, perhaps due to their total inability to sufficiently explain historical degradation, marginalisation and deprivation of women from basic human rights and their confinement into the sphere of private life.

Although growing numbers of women have attained high political office, a breakthrough is still a long way off. The proportion of women in the national parliaments of the EU varies considerably, from 10.3% in Greece to 43.6% in Sweden. The European Parliament is in the forefront with 30% women members, and it is interesting to note that the proportion of

women in each political group varies greatly, the highest being in the Parliamentary Group of the Party of the European Socialists (PES), which consist of 36% women and 42% of the Bureau members.

Women's under-representation denotes a serious deficit in terms of democracy. Full democracy cannot be achieved until women participate in decision-making process on an equal basis. Women's absence from politics constitutes a serious loss of talent and expertise and a failure to engage with women's particular concerns and needs; democracy will acquire a true and dynamic sense when women and men together define the values they wish to uphold in their political, economic, social and cultural life and together take the relevant decisions.

A gender balanced participation in politics should be the obvious consequence of the gender balance existing in nature. I feel that this balance existing in nature, if transferred both into private and public domains, it's very likely to create a similar balance in all spheres of economic, social, cultural and political life.

Politics *for* women can only be achieved *with* women and solely with sufficient numbers of women. True equality means parity. Women socialists and SIW have set themselves the goal of incorporating women equally into the decision-making processes. This means much more than merely occupying half of the seats in Parliament; it means equal participation of women at leadership levels of economy, of education, in administration and in the media, in the trade unions, in the highest courts and so on. As an immediate goal, Women's Rights Committee of the European Parliament demands that equal rights policies be sufficiently integrated into the treaties of the European Union.

Efforts to promote equal opportunities are being strengthened in many aspects of the European Union's policies and programmes. The key concept in these efforts is that of "mainstreaming", which denotes a more global approach to equality and calls for the integration of a gender perspective and gender analysis into all policies, programmes and actions of the Community. Finally, the Treaty of Amsterdam, which has been put into effect since 1st May 1999, has strengthened the legal framework within which gender equality has been placed and has contributed substantially to the consolidation of a more democratic and humane Europe. It is within this Europe that we, women Socialists, rest our hopes in order to achieve equality, so that women's skills and viewpoints do no longer remain unheard, underrepresented or overlooked. European Union provides us a trustworthy institutional context within which our efforts could become fruitful. At this point, I cannot but express my sincere satisfaction for the aftermath of the 1999 Helsinki Summit which rendered Turkey eligible for entry in the European Union. As a woman, as a Greek, as a European Socialist, I wholeheartedly support Turkey's candidature, as I feel that it gives us all a promising potential for cooperation and could benefit both sides.

Examining women's role in the 21st century, we have to consider the new environment created by the rapid technological change, the widening application of information and communication technologies. Women's role can be profound in this context. Concerns regarding the impact of ITCs are twofold: the first has to do with employment, that is whether these technologies actually destroy more jobs than they create; the second has to do with democracy and equality, that is whether the complexity of these technologies will widen the gap between developed and less developed areas, between

the rich and the poor and between the young and the old. To meet these concerns we need public policies which can help us reap the benefits of technological progress and achieve a fair distribution of the potential for prosperity. We believe that Information Society should be *about* people and should be used *for* people and by people to unlock the power of information, not to create inequalities between the information rich and the information poor. Considering women's sensitivity and awareness to social issues, we believe that in our hands, Information Society can become a tool for the creation of an inclusive society.

Women have proved to be more sensitive to social issues, more imaginative and less technocratic. Wherever women participate in public affairs, they put forward issues which are very often neglected from the male political agenda altogether; it is certain, that, if politics adopted women's values, there could be more resources left for the poor, there would be more social solidarity amongst people and nations, more awareness about social issues related to quality of life.

Problems of daily life would be more adequately addressed, and more satisfactorily solved, if more women were in power, since they are the ones who suffer from them: violence against women, incompatibility between family life and working life, lack of infrastructure for looking after young children, disabled and elderly people, medical care, inadequate transportation and degradation of environment are among the problems that we are facing in everyday life, but not enough effort has ever been made to eliminate them. It is no accidental that wherever women were having a decent representation in political life (e.g. Scandinavian countries), politics redefined its strategies and redirected its goals, giving more weight to values such as social

justice, equality and peace. Additionally, women, due to their everyday experience, and by adopting a more empirical approach to life, have the ability to overcome the practicalities of problems, set their priorities right and face up to their responsibilities.

Under the circumstances, I feel that we are entitled to a women's vision for the politics of the 21st century: a vision for the world as a whole, according to which, by acquiring more political power, we will help construct a societal and political architecture where all people will be equally and fairly embraced. We want to create a Europe where human rights will be fully respected, where inequalities and discriminations based on religion, ethnic origin, gender and race are absent from every country, where poverty and all forms of violence are eliminated, where the massive resources used in actions of destruction are diverted to relieve the poor, promote education, improve health and housing conditions, protect environment, both human and physical, bring security, trust, love and prosperity in people's life.

Let's work together to make our vision a reality!