

Brussels, Access to the Decision Making Process (στα αγγλικά)

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"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", professor Francis Fukuyama advocated in his article titled "If women ruled the world"

At a time when violence prevails around the world, I strongly believe that our continent, and world as a whole, would be a better place to live, if more women were to be involved in politics; there are indications that women decision-makers, if present in sufficient numbers, differ from their male colleagues in the priorities they set in their work and their approach towards certain issues. In this difficult time, where important questions beg for an answer and major changes need to take place, the issue at stake is what needs to be done in order to create a better world and what share women deserve to be given in this attempt.

Women are less confrontational than men are and one cannot but praise their ability to solve

differences by peaceful means. Very often, especially when looking around and seeing all this violence and war situations that dominate the world scene, I wonder what our world would be like if a considerable number of women were in power over the last centuries and political culture was therefore infused with their values. I strongly believe that our world would be more humane, human relations would be appreciated on a different ground whereas violence wouldn't be necessarily the way to solve differences between people and nations. Human life would be appraised as a unique value and peace as the highest ideal.

Women have also 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.

Furthermore, 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.

European women should consider themselves rather fortunate for living in this place of the world, where major developments have taken place over the last decades in connection with

democratic rights and gender equality. Being quite optimistic, I would dare say that they are fortunate, not only for what has been achieved up to date, but also for the prospects that Europe is giving for the future. However, we should not fail to raise our eyes upon all those countries, like Afghanistan, and not only, where women are deprived of the most basic human rights and democracy is totally undermined.

There is no doubt that a great deal has been achieved so far, which can allow us a little celebration. However, fundamental equality has not been achieved yet, since we are still poorer and with less power than men. 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, while the average percentage of women in national Parliaments is of 22.5% and of 24.5% in Governments. 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.

It is worthwhile mentioning the considerable progress made in the 1990's by the European Union. From 1991 to 1999 the number of women increased from 19% to 30% in the European Parliament, from 10% to 25% in the European Commission, which today counts five women Commissioners, and from 11% to 23% in the Member States governments

These figures should by no means reassure us, as they actually denote a serious deficit in terms of democracy. Full democracy cannot be achieved until women participate in decision-making

processes on an equal basis. The Commission has acknowledged that the under-representation of women in decision-making constitutes a loss for society as a whole and does not allow the interests and needs of the whole population to be catered for in full. That is why the European Network "Women in Decision-making" was set up in 1992 in order to elaborate ways and means to bridge the gap between men and women in representative political bodies. According to its analyses, women's under-representation results in 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.

Women's absence from political centres has negative impact upon development, due to lack of utilization of precious human resources. A balanced sharing of power and responsibilities between men and women will enrich political culture, will improve the quality of life of the whole population in Europe, and will bring a new balance in the world in general.

A gender balanced participation in politics should be the obvious consequence of the balance existing in nature. We 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 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, the women of the PES demand, therefore, that equal rights policies be sufficiently integrated into the treaties of the European Union.

We, European women, have the capacity to offer a message to the majority of citizens, and we claim that ultimately, we are in politics in order that people may live a bit better, have equality of opportunity and a sense of justice.

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.

Women, as a whole, are historically associated with non-violence; their value-system is associated with dialogue, compromise, reconciliation and settling-up of differences by peaceful means. This value-system can hopefully provide an alternative to the current culture of violence, whilst at the same time it can help the development of a new political culture, that of peace, co-operation and respect for differences. It is estimated that if politics adopted women's

values, there would be more social solidarity among people and nations, there would be no wars and conflicts due to religious fanaticism and extreme nationalism; additionally, there would be more awareness about social issues related to quality of life such as protection of the environment, social policy and welfare, health care, education and combating of drug-use and human trafficking.