

Brussels, European Elections 2004: Women Demand An Equal Share (στα αγγλικά)

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<u>EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LOBBY</u> <u>SEMINAR</u> "EUROPEAN ELECTIONS 2004: WOMEN DEMAND AN EQUAL SHARE"	Brussels, 10.10.200 3
Panel 1: "Presentations by women in high- level decision-making about the obstacles they face and their visions and ideas to improve the situation"	

• INTRODUCTION

On the eve of 21st century and more than a hundred of years after women were enfranchised, the question of women's political participation is now on the european and international agenda. Where are we today and where are we heading for tomorrow? Women's involvement in public life in Europe this century has been uphill all the way, and thus every small step is a major breakthrough. Even when men presided over the ultimate authority and decision-making structures, it was women who pushed for, expressed, formulated, lobbied and

sometimes simply protested their rights into place.

Women's participation in politics in Europe was launched by claiming their right to vote. First movements have already begun at the end of the 19th century, but it was only after a few decades that the right to vote for women was granted by the European governments.

Equally, women's participation in European politics was part of a broader undertaking at international level. In 1945, the UN Charter has recognised formally for the first time the principle of equal rights for both women and men, despite the fact that at the time, only half of the UN country members had granted the right to vote to women.

Following the recognition of the right to vote, the debate was focused on women's participation in decision-making level. A significant change was acknowledged when slowly enough, the role of two genders were to be transformed on the basis of job separation, since until 1970's, women dominated the agenda in private life, whereas men in public life. The launch of the concept of "gender" paved the way to the incorporation of equal opportunities for men and women in politics.

At the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, in 1995, the global community stressed the importance of women assuming positions of power and influence, because their points of view and talents are needed, but also as a matter of their human rights. Moreover, increased involvement of women in decision-making processes with respect to social values, development directions and allocation of resources enables women as well as men to influence political agendas and to help set priorities. Efforts to achieve gender equality are thus more likely to be brought into

the mainstream of decision-making and to be pursued from the centre rather than the margins.

Interest in gender-based differences and similarities in approaches to decision-making has increased in recent years. Recent evidence on women's entry into the "corridors of power", whether in governance, business or other public domains suggest that negotiation and consensus-building are among women's special abilities, along with the ability to listen, to see beyond one's own point of view and to adapt rapidly. Because of inborn altruism or their roles as mothers, women leaders can foster societies of peace and nurturing, women leaders of trade and industry could advance economic justice. Additionally, questions related to reproductive health and choice, nutrition, equality in education and in employment opportunities, child care and related "family-friendly" aspects are but some areas, where women have advocated for.

• WHERE ARE THE WOMEN DECISION-MAKERS TODAY?

More than two decades after the first United Nations conference on women in 1975, the statistical picture for women's participation at high levels of decision-making remains bleak.

The Beijing Platform for Action "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to take part in the Government of his/her country Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning. Equality in political decision-making performs a leverage function without which it is highly unlikely that a real integration of the equality

dimension in government policy-making is feasible . . . "

Today in Europe, despite the improvement of the legal status of women in political decision-making level, an important gap still persists between the improvement in legal terms and every day life. With the exception of Scandinavian countries of Northern Europe, the relatively recent grant to women of the right to vote in the majority of European countries has not produced any real significant increase in their representation in political institutions. Despite this under-representation, in all member states, there is a strong tendency for a greater women participation in politics, which clearly shows that things may prove better in the future.

National parties, eager to attract new voters, each party increasingly nominated women candidates. Almost all institutionalized quotas. But old gender patterns still persist: only a handful of countries have chosen women to hold the portfolios of foreign policy, finance, trade or defence – sectors that were not only traditionally dominated by men, but are also pivotal in international relations and can be viewed as the "public" face of a nation, in contrast to its domestic or "private" face.

In senior national civil service positions, the number of women has continued to increase – still largely in social welfare ministries, which have traditionally been associated with some of women's "caring" activities, but to a lesser extent in others, such as energy, agriculture and the environment. These latter ministries have been dominated by men – perhaps because of the current prominence of these areas in the economic and foreign policy agendas of Governments. While the fields of health, education, housing and community development doubtless mirror major concerns of many women throughout the world, female

concentration in these ministries perpetuates traditions of women managing women and certainly does not reflect the growing numbers of women economists, management experts, lawyers and engineers. Women at ministerial and sub-ministerial levels. The current European statistics still indicate a situation in which women are regarded at best as a "special-interest group" rather than half of humankind.

- **INCREASING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING**

There is a strong correlation between the level of female representation and the type of electoral system and strategies, adopted by the political parties. Political scholars strongly emphasize the effect that electoral systems have on women's representation for several reasons. The impact of electoral systems is quite dramatic. It can be seen that the differences in women's representation across electoral systems are substantial and electoral rules are far more malleable. According to a study produced by the Directorate-General for Research of the EP, the majoritarian system is seen to be unfair to women because with such an electoral practice, the success of the party heavily depends on the single candidate it selects. Additionally, proportional representation alone is not responsible for the strength of women parliamentarians in European Union countries. An important factor within proportional representation is the placement of female candidates in eligible positions on party lists.

The under-representation of women in politics is not only due to institutional factors, but, in many respects to different political regimes, political culture and the socio-economic position of women. The example of Scandinavian countries with strong democratic regimes, advanced social studies, hold one of the highest

percentages of women's representation in the world. In the countries of Southern Europe, with long lasting authoritarian regimes, similar percentages are very low.

Additionally, we should emphasize the responsibility of political parties as well as civil society organisations. To that end, parties should implement gender-conscious policies among their structure, the ranks of their staff as well as within their agendas and must take action to make sure that women should be equally represented on the ballot. Many political parties, reflecting the more general conditions in the rest of society, do not easily accept or promote may women into their ranks, let alone women's occupation of important positions within these parties.

The lack of sufficient training and communication skills, or media know-how, is also extremely problematic for women. Women politicians need to use the media for purposes of positive image building as well as dissemination of their agendas.

Awareness raising about women's rights and their capacities, as well as the way the media portrays and assists have come a long way, but they have not led to any changes over the last 10 years. However, the fact that in some countries, women's representation on local councils, is larger than that on national levels, does make for interesting considerations.

We also should increase efforts to gather information on gender statistics in political decision-making level, without this data, we cannot build appropriate mechanisms to monitor women's access to senior levels of decision-making.

More democracy does not necessarily introduce a change in mentality and political culture. It is

quite characteristic that the European media show that women are less interested in politics than men, read and watch less news and consider themselves less capable to be involved in politics.

- **European developments**
- **Council Recommendation for a gender balance in decision-making process**

The main legal instrument in the EU for a balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process is the **Council Recommendation 96/694 of 2 December 1996** concerning the necessity of establishing an integrated action to fight unequal gender representation in the EU institutions and in every decision-making body and the invitation to establish an integrated and specific European strategy and a common approach to achieve such a result.

As far as progress made by Member States is concerned, the **European Commission** has established a report on 2000 on the situation in respect to the four priorities laid down in the Recommendation, which briefly, are:

- Adoption of a comprehensive integrated strategy to promote a gender balanced participation in decision-making,
- Mobilising all the actors in economic and social life to achieve equal opportunities,
- Collection and publication of statistics on gender representation on decision-making,
- Promotion of a gender balance at all levels, in all areas.

The overall picture provided can only be considered as a starting point. In fact, not all Member States have been keen enough to provide information on the different priorities,

which, in their turn, are not sufficiently precise for Member States to adopt a common set of measures. The four priorities need to be made more precise and compulsory with precise deadlines to be met. It is only through precise deadlines and benchmarks that it will be possible to identify Member States, which have not compelled to their obligations, to register global progress and to advance in gender balance.

As a conclusion, on the basis of the information supplied, the Council Recommendation has been partly implemented by the Member States; further efforts must be done towards a more comprehensive integrated strategy which still does not exist.

- **The Women's Rights Committee Contribution**

The **Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities of the European Parliament**, that I have the honour to chair, is specifically concerned as regards the little emphasis placed by most Member States on the incorporation of a gender perspective in the political decision making.

-Towards the European Elections in June 2004

This year, in advance of the elections to the European Parliament 2004, my Committee as well as Commission have put the spotlight on women in decision-making and have concentrated its 2003 funding activities on the promotion of gender balance in decision-making, both in political and in economic life.

The Women's Committee has drawn up reports on the issue of women's **representation in decision-making**. In a resolution adopted in Plenary in the end of 2000, based on a report drafted by me, the promotion of women in decision-making is considered in the light of the

implementation of the Council Regulation of 1996 on the same subject. In September 2002, our committee adopted unanimously an own-initiative report by Miet SMET (EPP-ED) on the representation of women in the social partners of the European Union. The report, which was adopted by Plenary in September 2002, calls for strategies to boost the role of women and encourage the social partners to devise affirmative action programmes and to draw up targets, with deadlines, to increase the representation of women both in their internal organisations and in the collective bargaining process and as such in decision making.

In view of the European elections in 2004, a Public Hearing "Elections 2004: How to ensure balanced representation of women and men" was held in June 2003 (Rapporteur). Experts highlighted the need for a strategy ensuring gender balance on electoral lists and developing awareness-raising campaigns aiming at the advantages of parity democracy. An initiative report the Member of the Women's Committee Ms Lone DYBKJAER, on the same subject, that has been adopted during the last meeting of the Women's Committee in October 2003, highlights the need for positive action measures, awareness raising and information campaigns, the specific needs in the Accession Countries and the possibility of legislative action and increasing the pool of women candidates. Later on, Ms Lone DYBKJAER will present to you in detail the content and the findings of her report.

-The new Constitutional Treaty-Gender Equality

The European Convention is a good illustration to assess the present situation on the weak representation of women in the political forums. "Building a democratic Europe – Women's Convention" was the theme of two public hearings we have had in our committee on 22

May and on 2 October 2002, along with two conferences of the Network of Parliamentary Committees for Equal Opportunities of the EU, in Copenhagen Nov. 2002 and in Athens March 2003.

The discussions were very contraceptive and useful, and participants shared a number of common aims and conclusions. In close contact and support from Parliamentarians in the EU and Candidate Countries, some women Members of the Convention, NGOs and the civil society, we have put forward a number of requests in order that the women's voices would be heard in the work of the Convention.

In the beginning of September 2003, our Committee has given its input (Lone DYBKJAER, ELDR,) to the Parliament report on the draft Constitution and opinion on the convocation of the Intergovernmental Conference IGC. The Committee emphasises that the Convention has completed its task and that gender equality is an integral part of the draft Constitutional Treaty that the principle of gender mainstreaming is rightly placed as an horizontal article III-1 and that the fight against all forms of discrimination, including sex-based discrimination, is also rightly inserted as an horizontal article III-1a; Welcomes that equality is part of the European Union's values but emphasises that the gender composition of the Convention has been completely unacceptable: 17% women in a body of 105 members is far from enough to ensure a gender balance. Likewise, the composition of the Presidium consisting of 12 men and one woman was utterly unacceptable. It also regrets that gender equality and the fight against all forms of gender discrimination has not been inserted as a shared competence of the EU in the Draft Treaty on the European Constitution and also that the Convention did not incorporate an article in the institutional chapter requiring a

balanced representation of women and men in EU institutions. Although each Member State shall present three candidates for the post of Commissioner, in which both genders have to be represented, there is still a long way to go. Our Committee also regrets that no legal basis has been approved to combat all forms of violence against women and children.

Parity in political life remains an issue at both Member State and European level. Despite the fact that in some **Member States** there is a trend towards the introduction of legislation on parity, the results of recent national elections have left mixed feelings i.e. in France the law on parity had no impact on balancing gender representation, in Portugal a slight improvement etc.

• **CLOSING COMMENTS**

It makes clear that 50 per cent of Europe remains overwhelmingly under-represented in public decision-making. Righting gender imbalance is not only a rights issue, but also one of cost-effectiveness that involves the need to address the obstacles women face in fulfilling their rights to participation, including the stereotypes upon them from childhood in every culture. Dismantling these obstacles, as well as the prejudices that foster and support them, should be a central concern of the EU and the members states political agenda. It is also clear that failure to include women in positions of power and influence is a waste of human creativity and energy that is increasingly unaffordable. The participation of all citizens is central to democracy and thereby to any concept of peace. Democratizing decision-making is served by mainstreaming women in decision-making. Evidence suggests that once women achieve a critical mass, they have a chance to influence the agenda and to promote

gender equality for the benefit of the society or community as a whole.

Thank you for your attention.

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