

COMPARATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN IN THE EU AND TURKEY

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SEMINAR

Brussels, 13 October 2004

"THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE EUROPEAN-TURKISH RELATIONS"

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It is a great pleasure for me to take part in this debate on the EU and Turkey relations, organized by politically minded women, just on the right time, only a few days after the European Commission has given the green light for the integration of Turkey in the European structures. It was a historic decision. Coming from Greece, I have reasons to be particularly happy, since Turkey is the next door neighbour and the strengthening of the good neighbourly Greek-Turkish relations has been on the top of the political agenda of both countries, for the last ten years.

I always felt that Turkish accession to the EU would prove our ability to overcome divisions of any kind and build a political and economic union based on diversity and on common values such as peace, democracy, social justice, gender

equality and respect for human rights. The emphasis given by the Communication to women's rights reveals the crucial role that women can play in the accession process and the challenges ahead for the full realization of our common European dream. The EC recommendation of the 6th October 2004 is certainly a big step forward towards greater integration, defining at the same time the political and ethical premises of co-existence among Europeans.

The European Parliament Committee for the Rights of Women, which I had the privilege to chair during the previous term, is a crucial locus for the debate on gender issues, to enact and monitor legislation as well as to promote new initiatives and ideas to comply with the provisions concerning gender equality. Our Committee more particularly tried, during the enlargement process, with the very useful contribution of experts and women politicians, to assess the extent to which the enlargement of the EU would influence positively the social, political and professional life of women. Gender inequalities certainly are not only specific in Turkey, but are also present in the EU Member States. This is the reason why we must constantly rethink together policies where women's roles are often neglected and also further develop policies to address the problems. I am sure that Turkish women and their ngos can decisively contribute to this endeavour.

On behalf of the Committee on Women's Rights, I had to draft the Opinions of the Committee "on Turkey's membership application to the E.U. and the state of negotiations", in 2001 and also in 2004. To be honest, I drafted them in consultation with KADER, the organization which promptly gave me the information and the input I needed for a well informed and accurate

Opinion – meaning a little women's conspiracy, with the purpose to influence the reforms in favour of women. Thus, the Opinion of 2001 noted ***“the serious discrimination against women enshrined in law, particularly civil law, many articles of which-as the Turkish organization KADER has pointed out-are in breach of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which Turkey has ratified; notes with satisfaction that amendment of the Civil Code has finally been included on the agenda of the National Assembly...”***

We also noted the high level of unemployment affecting women, mostly in rural areas, the limited number of working women who are covered by social security, the unequal earnings, the low representation of women in political life, the high illiteracy and school drop-out rates, the high rates of violence etc. calling the Turkish Government to carry a thorough revision of all the legislative and regulatory provisions which are in breach of the principle of gender equality, while ensuring that the necessary mechanisms and resources are in place to ensure effective implementation. At the same time we called the Commission and the Council to grant financial support to Turkey to fully align its methods of collecting and analysing statistical data by gender and promote fully Turkey's participation in Community programmes, like STOP and DAPHNE to combat violence against women.

In the Opinion of 2004 we were in a better situation, thus my Committee welcome the efforts made in the field of women's rights, but also deplored the fact that the Turkish national instrument “General Directorate for the Situation and Status of Women” is still lacking a legal status and consequently the necessary economic and human resources; We noted with

concern that domestic violence and other forms of violence against women are still widespread and urged Turkey to provide full legal protection and judicial and economic aid to victims, as well as shelters and similar facilities, which are almost nonexistent;

We also expressed our concern about the assaults, often of a sexual nature, on women by members of the state security services, that Kurdish women in particular are victims of such attacks and called on Turkey to investigate such attacks thoroughly and to take all effective measures necessary to prevent them from happening;

We called on Turkey ***“to adopt gender equality as part of the sixth reform package of the Penal Code and to amend Article 51 of the general provisions, which relates to crimes committed under extreme provocation, applicable for offences traditionally viewed as being against virtue; additionally, we requested the discontinuation of the practice of having sentences reduced in cases of ‘honour crimes’, on grounds of customs and tradition (Article 462), notes that such crimes should be considered as murder in the first degree, as well as the deletion of the term ‘virginity’ from the rape crime provisions under the Penal Code;”***

We deplored the fact that the implementation of the new Civil Code provisions allowing equal sharing of goods acquired during marriage has been very limited and we urged Turkey to implement Article 8 of the European Social Charter, ratified by Turkey, the right of employed women to protection of maternity and also repeated our concern for the low representation of women in elected bodies and the government. Today we are in a position to express satisfaction for the progress made and the serious reforms that have taken place.

Dear friends,

In recent years, specific legislative instruments, designed to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and men which form part of the "Community acquis", constitute a considerable achievement for Europe. In this respect, the process of further enlargement of the EU represents an excellent opportunity for Turkey and the EU to share this achievement and to promote gender equality objectives in all spheres of life.

Furthermore, this is a real necessity, in order to respond to the developments , where inequalities between women and men have in many areas become more severe during the transition to a free market economy. In this respect, not only adoption but also adequate implementation of the "Community acquis" before accession to the EU is vital for ensuring gender equality and must be seen as a priority in the accession process.

In its opinion on 22 April 2002 on the state of enlargement negotiations the Women's Rights Committee of the European Parliament has emphasised that "**adoption of the "Community acquis" in the area of gender equality is a condition sine qua non for accession, since it is essentially a question of human rights**" adding, "**we want gender mainstreaming to be implemented**" and "**the necessary institution building or reinforcement of institutional and administrative capacity in this area is a vital prerequisite to full implementation of the "acquis"**" and stressed that the candidate countries should **ensure full and effective implementation of the "acquis", as regards gender equality, before accession**. In this context, we have insisted that the European Union should promote and support, with financial and human resources, the candidate

countries in the work to efficiently implement the "acquis" on gender equality and pre-accession funds to build institutions.

We know that Turkey has made a considerable progress on gender equality in terms of legislation and institutional framework, but there is still a need for further effort to promote the economic, social and political equality of women. Having regard to the negative effects of the transition process for many candidate countries, we can point out that women are the first victims of budget cuts in provision of childcare facilities, education and in social protection systems that underpin the reconciliation of work and family life.

Furthermore, other issues of particular concern, which most if not all European countries share, are trafficking of women and sexual exploitation, prostitution, under-age prostitution and child pornography, as well as domestic violence. In its above mentioned opinion of 22 April 2002, the Women's Rights Committee "***called on the European Commission, in co-operation with Member States and the candidate countries, to take effective measures to promote networks and partnerships between the police, judicial, migration and social authorities, as well as between NGO's and international organisations***". On the other hand, our committee urged the Commission to "***reinforce the efforts to eradicate all forms of violence, as a part of its accession strategy to ensure respect of women's human rights***".

We have also underlined, all along the enlargement process, the important role of NGO's and the need for closer involvement of civil society. In this respect, we have drawn attention to the fact that a closer co-operation between women's NGO's in the EU Member States and the candidate countries must be increasingly supported, as well as that women's

NGOs in the candidate countries must receive increased support through the pre accession funds. Again, I see this as an important short-term priority to put on our common agenda.

To conclude, I wish to recall what I consider as the most important issues for our common gender equality agenda and, for our future "shared framework" to ensure that gender equality becomes an integral part of political action. A political agenda which places gender equality as a priority is credible only with an equal representation of women and men in decision making positions. For political parties, zip lists, quotas etc. are some of the means used to increase the proportion of elected women and move towards parity democracy.

As a final note, I am convinced as a woman, as a Greek and European that equality is a necessity, not only for the labour market, but to promote a better understanding of public policies, of conflicts and their resolution, of the aspirations of people and their fears in a globalised, multicultural and complex world. I would like, once more, to welcome Turkey and its brave women to our European family. We need you dear sisters to work together to construct the EU we dream. A better Europe and equality of men and women is possible!!

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