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**PES Women 20th anniversary booklet (2014)**

a)As a PES Women vice-president, for the last ten years, I became part of a wonderful team of women, which under the dynamic leadership of Zita Gurmai has given weight and impetus to the work on gender equality, within our political family, on both European and national level. Our overall strategic objective has motivated and has united us: achieve a gender equal and just society. We have been successful in raising awareness on the multiple benefits of gender equality and in mainstreaming gender in all PES bodies, and party members all over Europe. During the last twenty years we have made gender more visible, central in PES key policy documents and dominant in the debate on Social Europe, which I count as our greatest success. PES Women have also influenced, through well-aimed political interventions, the shaping of EU Gender Equality Policies. We have contributed to the adoption of the *EU Roadmap* and the *Gender Pact*, outlining priority areas for the period 2006-2010 and we insisted that gender equality, should be enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty, among the fundamental European values.

b) Under the current financial crisis, the rocketing unemployment and the rise of the far right, the situation of women in EU is under threat. Historically the right has always been hostile towards feminism and equal rights. Since these values lie at the core of socialdemocratic theory and practice, the socialist parties must keep supporting women’s organizations and join forces with PES Women to eliminate unequal gender hierarchies, deconstruct patriarchy, achieve a gender balance in all democratic institutions and a fair share of political power and domestic care. Recent studies have shown that gender inequality is a clear waste of human resources and has a high political, economic and social cost.

c) My personal memories are connected with extensive lively discussions, debates, papers and contributions to the policy and action plans of PES. I enjoyed every meeting, every event and every congress: in Paris, Berlin, Stockholm, Ljibljana, Madrid, Praha, Warsow, Athens, Milano, Sofia, Lisbon, Rome. I have very much appreciated the dedication, the spirit and the effectiveness of Paul Rassmussen’s PES leadership. Under Paul’s and Zita’s presidency I was always kept alert of the importance of our mission: to mobilize women across EU, support socialdemocratic programs and participate in building a gender balanced and socially just Europe. A whole chapter, under the title “Championing Gender Equality in Europe”, was included in our PES Manifesto for the 2009 European Elections. PES Women have worked hard to pass the political messages of the Manifesto, by organizing events and mobilizing women all over Europe. PASOK Women, in Greece, have actively participated in the elections campaign, as they did in all action plans and campaigns promoted by the PES Women.

However, the most memorable event, among many, was the **mission of** **PES Women to Afghanistan,** in November 2002, a year after the fall of the Taliban regime. The journey was indeed *long, full of adventure and full of knowledge*, just like the Greek poet Cavafis would say. It was a sheer folly, according to some! We were a small group of PES women, headed by the ever memorable, then PES Women president and MEP **Fiorella Ghilardotty**, the MEPs Lissy Groner, Marie-Helene Gillig, Genevieve Fraise and myself and the PES advisors Brigitte Bataille, Armand Borrey, and Bernard Vervoort. For an entire week, we stayed in the country that had so much troubled the entire world during the previous year. Nevertheless, fear and doubts receded when faced with our objective: express our support and solidarity to the Afghan women and secure that the country is being rebuilt in a way that takes care of the rights and advancement of women´s position. It was an overwhelming experience, an unforgettable political expedition that has convinced us that women in Afghanistan do not only necessitate humanitarian aid, but they mainly need bold political action to be undertaken. Their situation, as we witnessed it, was tragic in every aspect. *Blue ghosts*, in their burga, circulated everywhere, with only very few daring to take it off and endanger their lives. The Taliban had lost power, but their spirit and the traditions were present everywhere.

We met with the President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, with the former King and Father of the Nation, Zaher Shah, the ministers of Health, Education, Foreign Affairs, Women Issues, Interior Affairs, National Economy and Justice, as well as with Dr Sima Samar, President of the Committee for Human Rights and with several NGOs. We visited areas where EU projects were implemented, in Kabul and also in the countryside. We travelled to Bamyan, 250 klm north-west of Kabul, where the Taliban had destroyed the sculptures of Buddha. It took us 15hours to arrive there after riding a harsh road and crossing minefields! In Bamyan we met with the mayor of the town and the forum of women organizations, realizing that this was the first opportunity these women ever had to speak in public and meet with women of another culture. They were even ashamed of uttering their name, while they were constantly hiding their faces. On the next day the UN sent a plane to take us back to Kabul and to our hotel- the almost destroyed from bombing *Intercontinental,* with the broken windows and the problematic provision of electricity and running water.

At any rate, it was an exciting and a most constructive journey. We even witnessed gestures of good will, by the minister of Interior, who just one day after our visit, he liberated 20 women who had been convicted of adultery. Nevertheless, until today not much has changed for women in Afghanistan. Today's great challenge is to give voice to women everywhere whose experiences go unnoticed, whose words go unheard. PES Women can challenge the appalling phenomena that insult the core of our most fundamental human values.

d) PES Women have changed the patriarchal structure of PES, which was dominant twenty years before. Gender balance in all delegations and representations is secured by the PES statutes. This has had an impact upon the culture of the PES party members, too. The situation has not become ideal, but there has been substantive progress. At the same time, through important and effective campaigns PES Women have succeeded in mobilizing women in EU, including the neighbouring and candidate countries. The campaigns have been very successful and with the help of Internet and social media had a spill- over effect, on both European and domestic level: “Stop trafficking and sexual exploitation of women”, “Elimination of violence against women”, “More and Better Childcare and Parental leave”, “Gender Pay Gap, Shut it”, “My Body my Rights”, “Women-Men 50/50 in decision-making”, “Preserve Women’s Pension Rights”, “Equal Pay-It’s about time!”, “A Charter for European Women’s Rights”. To these we should add the political pressure to define rights within the 2020 European Strategy and promote youth employment campaign.

e) Despite considerable progress, gender inequalities and discriminations against women still persist and in many cases, due to economic crisis, are accelerating. The signs of a backlash are already visible: higher unemployment for women, discriminations against young women and more violence against them. This is why, the work of the PES Women, from now on, will be more necessary than ever before. PES Women should concentrate on: a) demand gender parity in all decision-making bodies, meaning sharing political power as well as care of domestic life and define the future on an equal footing, men and women. I strongly believe, that if women and men had an equal share of rights, power and care responsibilities, the whole world would be a better place to live, for both men and women 2) eliminate any discrimination on the basis of gender. The fact that women bear children cannot justify unequal citizenship 3) Save the social state and foreground the social rights that lay at the heart of the postwar European project and socialdemocratic ideology. My best hope for the world is to figure out a way for humanity to achieve global justice and equality. We certainly need a new thinking, new ideas, open new avenues and discover new ways of addressing the problems of the 21st century.

f) Wishing the best to everyone involved in the 20 years of the PES Women’s struggle for gender equality and social justice. The Struggle Continues! Social democracy must regain the political hegemony in EU! Victory is Certain!!!