COMMITTEE ON WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY 2008

HOW DO YOU CONSIDER THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PARLIAMENTARY WORK?

BRUSSELS, 6 MARCH

SEMINAR ON «GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN PARLIAMENTARY WORK»
FROM 11.00 TO 18.00
HEMICYCLE
NOTES FROM THE SEMINAR

SPEECHES

On the occasion of the International Women's Day 2008, a seminar on "Gender mainstreaming in parliamentary work" was organised. In the first part of the seminar, three speakers took the floor:

Ms Marjeta Cotman (Minister of Labour, Family and Social Affairs from the Republic of Slovenia holding currently the Presidency of the European Council)
Ms Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou (Vice-President of the European Parliament and chairwoman of the High-Level Group on Gender Equality and Diversity)
Mr Vladimir Špidla (Member of the European Commission responsible for Employment, Social Affairs and equal Opportunities). The chair of this seminar was held by Dr Anna Záborská.

Ms Cotman:
Equality between men and women constitutes a part of the acquis communautaire, thus a fundamental obligation for member states. According to indicators women participating in political decision making positions as parliamentarians is on average 23% in member states and 33% at the European Parliament. That being said, it could be easily assumed that the target of 40% of women's representation is still to be reached. In the light of the forthcoming European elections, there is more we could in this direction. For instance, Slovenia has introduced quotas, and 40% of the Slovenian representatives in the European Parliament should be women.

The role of the social partners is important for the reconciliation of family and professional life, as well as for the elimination of discrimination. From the Presidency's side, Germany, Portugal and Slovenia have declared their commitment to promote long-term cooperation on gender equality and its integration to all EU policies. As far as the Slovenian Presidency is concerned, we have prepared studies on gender equality in employment and budget, but we have also addressed the issue of stereotypes. We organised an informal ministerial meeting about the elimination of stereotypes and the traditional role of gender. The general opinion is that men are still more represented and occupy key positions, while women's representation is low and they have to prove constantly their capacities. The situation has to be challenged. That is why the Slovenian Presidency will prepare a report on the Beijing indicators concerning women in political decision-making positions. Only if we work together, men, women, EU, member states and the social partners, we can obtain better results and make progress on women's participation in the political decision process at national, regional and local level. In that perspective the role of the European Parliament and the FEMM committee are essential for the integration of gender into EU legislation. The dimension of gender must be implemented in all policies.

Ms Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou:
The promotion of equality between men and women is a collective effort. The Treaty of Rome laid the foundations, the Treaty of Maastricht made precise objectives for the battle against discrimination and the Lisbon Treaty refers to gender equality as one of EU's values and objectives. In other words, equality between men and women is a fundamental principle of our actions and policies, in an horizontal way, within the EU, as well as in the context of the enlargement. Women’s Rights and Gender Equality Committee of the European Parliament fulfils a tri-dimensional role, aiming at three main goals: "bringing to light" specific cases of sex discrimination and inequalities, securing that women's special interests are addressed in all the policies
of the European Union, through opinions and parliamentary resolutions, and taking own initiatives, under the form of reports, for women's cases where there is more work to be done, either because they have not been taken into account or they have been neglected in EU policies. Gender mainstreaming is the challenging task to ensure that gender is being taken into consideration in all policy areas, at all levels. Women's interests must be taken into account at all times. There is a need for more cooperation between the European Parliament and National Parliaments, which will be intensified with the Lisbon Treaty. Gender equality is not reached automatically, but only through participation and cooperation.

Mr Špidla:
Women's rights are not to be celebrated only once a year, but they should be considered everyday. Equality between men and women is a fundamental right of the Charter of Human Rights, but also a fundamental value of the Founding Treaties and the Lisbon Treaty. This fundamental principle is an integral part of the EU integration process and has been achieved not only through efficient Community legislation and the European Court of Justice, but also with the support of the member states. Gender mainstreaming has a double approach: firstly introduce gender equality in all policies and secondly take specific actions in favour of women. We have a goal of 60% of women active in employment and we are close to reach that goal. As for the critical mass of 40% for women in the political decision-making positions, there is still way to go since women's participation in the national parliaments reached the 27% in 2007. Only 10% of women occupy higher administrative posts or are members of boards in businesses. The European Commission has adopted a two year plan that has gender equality as its priority in the employment field and social affairs. This plan goes along with an annual working programme emphasizing on the progress made in all policy areas. Some of our future activities concerning gender equality are the launch of an action against the pay gap, information and awareness raising, the evaluation of EU legislation to reach a better balance between family and professional life and a report on the application of the Barcelona objectives. Concerning women in decision-making process, the European Commission has already published a report underpinning women's under-representation in industry and politics. That is why a network was created, so as to encourage women's participation in decision-making positions. After the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, cooperation between the European and national parliaments will be intensified. Together, they can play a key role for a more active and dynamic implementation of the gender mainstreaming. As "guardian of the Treaties", the European Commission will make sure that gender equality is taken into account in all EU policies. It is worth mentioning that for the first time ever there are so many women commissioners leading the following DGs:

- Health
- Institutional Relations and Communications
- Information Society and Media
- Regional Policy
- Financial Programming and Budget
- Competition
- External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy
- Agricultural and rural Development
- Consumer Protection
Ms Minodora CLIVETI-Romania: Is there a strategy for cooperation between the European Parliament and the National Parliaments of the member states?

Ms Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou: Even though there is no legislative framework for the cooperation between the European Parliament and the national ones, there is the network between the Committee of women's rights and gender equality of the European Parliament and the equivalent committees in all the national parliaments that sit regularly. Reversing Romania's question, Ms Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou wondered whether the Committees of European Affairs in the National Parliaments have in their agenda the issue of gender equality and women's rights, or whether they are dealing only with the revisions of the Treaties and not with all the EU policies, as they have committed to do so. Sexual harassment is an example of discrimination against women, which has not been dealt with in most "national realities" up until now.

Mr Arminas LYDEKA-Lithuania: Does the European Parliament have contacts with religious communities and during dialogue with them, are women being represented?

Ms Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou: The European Parliament has no official competence in the religious dialogue, but it communicates with all religions. The European Parliament considers religion more as a "living cultural reality" and is not interested in each country's official or unofficial religion, but rather it places religion in the intercultural framework.

Mr Špidla: Every year the European Commission organises meetings with all the religious faiths. We have frequent contacts with the main religions of Europe.

Greek delegation: How does the European Parliament take into account the multiple dimensions of different cultures, in the case of migrants?

Ms Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou: It is a real challenge to deal with the issue of migrants, not only for managing jointly the waves of migration, but also for the integration of migrants in the society. Women migrants are facing specific discriminations, such as poverty and marginalisation. The main concern is how the migrants will get to know their own rights and the opportunities that the country of reception has to offer to them. The question is how national and political authorities of each member state are working in this direction, and how the Community's legislation on migration has been implemented in the member states. For instance, Greece has implemented in its national legislation Council's Directive 2003/86/EC of 22 September 2003 on the right to family reunification.
Mr Trifon MITEV - Bulgaria
Women represent 21% of the members of the Bulgarian parliament, 44% of Bulgarian members of the European Parliament, 24% of ministers in the Bulgarian government and 10% of mayors. In Bulgaria, equality is a principle enshrined in the constitution. We have set a goal to reach 57% of women participation in the labour market and 60% by 2020. There is also a focus on demographic development of the country and important changes and new bills are being planned in order to find solutions. There is a good will from the social partners, the society itself and the politicians to reach these goals.

Ms Eva MÖLLRING - Germany
Having a woman Prime Minister is a very positive aspect for our country, and in the Council of ministers there are five women ministers and ten men. In addition, 31% of the members of the parliament are women. Women's participation in the labour market is 72% (even though the majority works part-time). There are very few women in high positions, due to the fact that the economy is not ready yet to welcome women in the higher hierarchical posts. That is why quotas are being discussed (but so far there has been an opposition against this possibility). One of the biggest problems alongside with the low representation on regional and national level is the decrease in women's participation in politics at the local level. It seems that women are not willing or they do not have the access to politics at local level. Noteworthy progress is made in three areas: the economic compensation for a year for maternity and paternity leaves, the increase of nursery schools and the increasing number of female teachers.

Ms Edit BAUER - MEP (EPP-ED Group)
We have still a long way to go to reach equality between men and women. The principle of equal pay for equal work exists for fifty years, but there are still inequalities. It could be said that the European legislation is very good, but unfortunately we still have to look for solutions, not only to the big issues, but also to the small ones that women face in their everyday life. The Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee of the European Parliament has decided to look through all the Directives that have been adopted so as to find out which of them are being fully implemented. We have to go a step further and implement properly the EU legislation.

Ms Fevronia PATRIANAKOU-KARAISKOU-Greece (addressing also a message from the president of the Special Committee on Gender Equality and Human Rights of the Hellenic Parliament)
This seminar is a great opportunity for the exchange of views among members of parliaments. Nowadays, women are facing multiple challenges and they are playing multiple roles. Their social and political emancipation has changed their image; they are no longer only mothers or wives. There must be more information given to women and to the associations supporting their rights. In the developing countries, women fight for their life, while in the developed countries, they fight for their rights. In Greece there are some positive aspects and new policies regarding women. For example the law on research and technology set an objective of women's participation to 33%. The civil service code has been enriched with issues concerning mothers of large families, maternity, elimination of stereotypes, and for the very first time, parental leave for fathers as well. Another issue of high importance is the trafficking of women and children. There should be a
European Parliament's recommendation authorising all gender equality committees in national parliaments to have a binding scrutiny right for legislation for all sectors.

Ms Gisèle GAUTIER - France
Some of the issues of concern in France are prostitution, the pay gap, single parent's families and women in the media. Eight ministers in the French government are women, holding key portfolios such as Justice and Defence. A law on parity has contributed to the progress. Taking into account the very low participation of women in local and regional councils (6%) a new law has been adopted to encourage local authorities, communities, regions and municipalities to increase women's participation in politics. The French Senate will organise an NCEO meeting during the French Presidency.

Ms Evagelia AMMANATIDOU - Greece
Inequalities exist not only between men and women, but also among women. A recent example can be found at the international fair of Thessaloniki, where for girls offering promotion services a catalogue (available on the net, then withdrawn) was created with various prices, depending on the girl and their physical proportions, exposing women as commodities. Women can be discriminated according to other "standards" and get paid differently for the same services they may provide.

Ms Dimitra ARAPOGLOU - Greece
There is social exclusion of people with disabilities and they face discriminations. The main areas that should be discussed are women having children with disabilities, women as victims of trafficking, violence against women, women immigrants, special care for single mothers, mothers of large families, maternity and equality between parents in case of adoption. Working women are concentrated in the private sector and face inequalities. Another serious problem is illiteracy among women. There should be equal access to education for all. Unfortunately, people with disabilities do not participate equally in education, for example university students with hearing impairments do not have lectures translated in the sign language.

Ms Christine DOERNER - Luxembourg
Since 2004 the government has engaged itself to carry gender-impact assessments of political actions. Following this decision the Government has adopted a reinforced strategy for the promotion of women's rights in the fields of finance, access to employment and social affairs (such as prostitution), adoption and in general family affairs. Our Equal Opportunities committee is being consulted and has joint meetings with other committees, it organises regularly hearings on issues relevant to its competencies.

Ms Gabriele HEINISCH-HOSEK - Austria
An active policy of equal opportunities requires a good anti-discriminatory policy. But these two policies have to be combined with the active defence of women's rights, in other words with positive actions taken in favour of them. Equal opportunities go side by side with positive actions, they complement one another, but in no way they can replace one another. An example of best practice in Austria is the gender budgeting, a decision taken at the national level to apply this procedure to all budget-related issues at all levels.

Ms Barbara BORYS-DAMIECKA - Poland
A paradox of Poland lies in the very low participation of women in the political, economical and social lives. Women working in the private sector (enterprises/companies) represent 34% of the workforce and hold mainly administrative posts even though 80% of these women have a university diploma.
Unfortunately, they have to prove constantly that they are more capable than men, and fight for obtaining the same salary. For example, a female manager earns only 64% of a man's salary for the same post. Women face obstacles while pursuing a career, for instance during recruitment and evaluation for new posts. It is difficult to combine family and professional life. Such indirect and hidden discriminations have a negative impact on the self-esteem of women.

Ms Maria DO ROSÁRIO CARNEIRO - Portugal
Women's representation in our national parliament reaches 28% (65 women in total), still I am the only woman chairing a standing committee. This will hopefully change, since a new law on parity between women and men, has been adopted, according to which women's participation should increase to 33%. We have drafted a list of all the professions where there could be an impact of gender, and we have presented two reports, one to the sub-Committee on Equal Opportunities and Family and another one to the Committee competent for each profession. Luxembourg gave a nice example with the evaluation form for measuring the gender impact, and it could help us to evaluate the effectiveness of the legislative measures being taken. This could be a more concrete way to influence the public authorities on the implementation of equal opportunities policy.

Mr Lásló NAGY - Slovakia
There are 30 women members of the Slovak parliament (20% of all representatives) and only few committee Chairs or Vice-chairs are women. We should take into account gender mainstreaming during the elaboration of the electoral lists, so as to obtain a more equal representation of women. We are open to best practises of the European Parliament, in order to learn more. The Committee on Human Rights, Minorities and the Status of Women promotes the integration of the gender perspective in all policies. On the administrative level, the Directorate-General for Internal Policy and the Directorate-General for Administration and Staff have appointed a director in charge of equality between men and women.

Ms Paraskevi BOUZALI - Greece
We have come a long way defending women's rights, but we have still a long way to go. There has been progress in the employment field e.g. with training programmes, we supported the increase of financial aid for women and we are fighting violence against women and sexual harassment. There is a legislative framework to combat violence inside the family. We encourage women in the decision making positions, and we have taken positive actions for small and medium size business, so as to improve the working conditions of women. The battle for women's rights is a battle against a mentality of the past, which needs to be changed.

Ms Tarja TALLQVIST - Finland
In the Finnish Parliament there is a unique Network for women's issues. It is a cross-party and cross-committee structure. The network has a steering group that coordinates the activities in different policy areas. The network also organises seminars and meetings. The strengthening of legislation for the protection of children could be mentioned as a recent achievement. As to the areas of concern, most striking is the recent increase in domestic violence in Finland.

Ms Sanna PERKIÖ - Finland
Finland has actually achieved a good participation of women in politics, including top positions in the political decision-making process: the Head of State is a woman and in the current government twelve out of twenty minister posts are held by women, so men are in fact the minority. A lot has been achieved, and in many areas Finland can
serve as an example, but issues like the one mentioned by the previous speaker are still to be addressed.

Ms Hillevi ENGSTRÖM - Sweden
Equality between men and women starts within the family. Moreover school and education can transmit the value of equality to young boys and girls. The Swedish labour market is marked by segregation. Women chose their profession based on traditional stereotypes and the majority of them are still occupied in the public sector. There must be reconciliation between private and public life for women. Why do we always have to see numbers and percentages from women's perspective? We will soon have a modification of parental leave legislation in Sweden. The political group I belong to (conservatives) does not support quotas on this issue, but we have proposed a bonus of 300 euros per month to the families that share equally the parental leave. In Sweden there is no particular committee for women's rights, but there is gender mainstreaming in all parliamentary committees and a network on equal opportunities.

Mr Olle THORELL - Sweden
Solidarity among women is essential but also men should take initiatives in order to change the current situation. There is still very low participation of women in the private sector: if one looks at the list of directors of companies listed on the stock market, the under-representation is striking — there are more men with the most common male first names then all women put together. Speaking of positive examples, the EP could introduce provisions for the parliamentarian's maternity leave, as it has been done by the Swedish parliament.

Ms Elmaze SELMANI - FYROM
If compared to the past situation, we have achieved a comparatively high participation of women in politics: 31% of the National Parliament members are women, there are seven female committee Chairs, and overall the trend is towards an increase of women's participation. On the downside men are still dominant in the economical decision-making process.

Mr Mehmet Zafer ÜSKÜL - Turkey
Our country is facing many problems as regards the integration of Turkish origin Europeans in the EU, and in many cases women are more vulnerable and affected.

Ms Senal BAL-Turkey
Concerning women’s rights, there is no legislation deficit, but there is a need for the actual application of law into practice in the everyday life. We share in common with all of you the values of human rights, women rights and the supremacy of the law. Some of the problems that affect mainly women and children are poverty, immigration, international terrorism, natural disasters. The globalisation of the world must be "open" to more humanity and all of us should contribute towards a more human world.

Ms Anna CURDOVA - Czech Republic
Our country is not the best example on equality between men and women. Unfortunately there is no political will for the application of the European Commission's and the European Parliament's recommendations. We have the lowest rate of women's representation in the national parliament. In the government there are only two women; one in charge of the Defence and the other one in charge of Human Rights and Minorities. There is a maternity leave with a duration up to four years that is also available to fathers, but usually women are the ones staying at home and their return to the labour market becomes more difficult. There is no anti-
discrimination legislation and it has become pointless to talk about women's participation in politics.

Speaking on behalf of the Committee on Equal Opportunities of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, we would like to invite Ms Záborská, Chair of the Women's Rights and Gender Equality of the European Parliament, for a meeting in Strasbourg or in Paris, in order to continue our cooperation.

Ms Thalia DRAGONA - Greece
The legislative measures are not sufficient on their own; there is a need to implement them. Equality does not concern only women. The number of women deputies in the Greek parliament is still low (16%) and there are only three women in the government. There have been some measures of positive discrimination, such as minimum threshold for women participation in the political decision-making process at the national and regional level (30%). Unfortunately that is not the case for women at the regional level, where there are being under-represented. An alternative proposal would be not to celebrate the International Women's Day anymore, because I am not sure whether this day still holds its symbolic meaning.

Ms Barbara NIKOLAIĐOU - Greece: The 8th of March is not only a celebration of women's rights but it is a tribute to all women, especially the working ones. We should not forget the social conquests of the socialist and the communist movement in defence of women's rights. They make part of the human rights and as such, they concern everyone. In Greece, there is a well organised women's movement that defends and protests over the daily problems women have to face.

PUBLIC DEBATE

Ms Marie de BLIC - CNAFC
The European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality could do a study on the practices followed by the member states for the reconciliation of professional and family life of women. The national parliaments have also a key role to play to this study.

Ms Cécile GRÉBOVAL - European Women's Lobby
With regard to the European elections, we would like to know whether the national delegations present at this seminar, would be in favour of the parity mechanism to be introduced at the European Parliament itself directly.

Conclusions of the seminar by the Chairperson Dr. Anna Záborská
The dialogue and the cooperation between the European Parliament and the National Parliaments on equality issues is an important process. We can contribute together towards a better understanding of the policies for equality. National Parliaments could be considered as forums for the further promotion of gender mainstreaming. Starting from the understanding of problems and the challenges of
equality, it is also vital to implement Community Directives on gender equality, together with the *acquis communautaire* and member-states' national law.
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Speakers at the seminar on "Gender Mainstreaming in parliamentary work"

National Delegations

Mr Trifon MITEV - Bulgaria (Deputy Chairman of the sub-Committee on Equal Opportunities-Human Rights and Religious Affairs Committee)

Ms Eva MÖLLRING - Germany (Chairperson Committee on Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth)

Ms Edit BAUER Slovakian MEP (EPP Group)

Ms Fevronia PATRIANAKOU-KARAISKOU - Greece (Member Special Committee on Gender Equality and Human Rights)

Ms Gisèle GAUTIER - France (Présidente Délégation aux Droits des Femmes et à l'Égalité des Chances entre les hommes and les femmes)

Ms Evagelia AMMANATIDOU - Greece (Member Special Committee on Gender Equality and Human Rights)

Ms Dimitra ARAPOGLOU - Greece (Member Special Committee on Gender Equality and Human Rights)

Ms Christine DOERNER - Luxembourg (Membre Commission de la Famille, de l'Égalité des Chances et de la Jeunesse)

Ms Gabriele HEINISCH-HOSEK - Austria (Chairperson Committee on Gender Equality)

Ms Barbara BORYS-DAMIECKA - Poland (Deputy Chairperson Culture and Media Committee)

Ms Maria DO ROSÁRIO CARNEIRO - Portugal (Chairperson sub- Committee on Equal Opportunities and Family)

Mr László NAGY - Slovakia (Chairman Committee on Human Rights, Minorities and the Status of Women)

Ms Paraskevi BOUZALI - Greece (Member Special Committee on Gender Equality and Human Rights)

Ms Tarja TALLQVIST - Finland (Member Employment and Equality Affairs Committee)
Ms Sanna PERKIÖ - Finland (Member Employment and Equality Affairs Committee)

Ms Hillevi ENGSTRÖM - Sweden (Chairperson Committee on the Labour Market)

Ms Olle THORELL - Sweden (Deputy member Committee on Foreign Affairs)

Ms Elmaze SELMANI - FYROM (Member Committee on Equal Opportunities for women and men)

Mr Mehmet Zafer ÜSKÜL - Turkey (Chairman Examination of Human Rights Committee)

Ms Senal BAL - Turkey (Member Examination of Human Rights Committee)

Ms Anna CURDOVA - Czech Republic (Member Permanent Commission for Equal Opportunities)

Ms Thalia DRAGONA - Greece (Member Special Committee on Gender Equality and Human Rights)

Ms Barbara NIKOLAIDOU - Greece (Member Committee on Public Administration, Public Order and Justice, Vice- President of the Hellenic Parliament)

NGO's

Ms Marie de BLIC - CNAFC

Ms Cécile GRÉBOVAL - European Women's Lobby