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REPORT

on the Commission report on the implementation of Council Recommendation 96/694 of 2nd December 1996 on the balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process
(COM(2000) 120 – C5-0210/2000 – 2000/2117(COS))

Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities

Rapporteur: Anna Karamanou

CONTENTS

	Page
PROCEDURAL PAGE	4
MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION.....	5
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT	10

PROCEDURAL PAGE

By letter of 7 March 2000, the Commission forwarded to Parliament its report on the implementation of Council Recommendation 96/694 of 2nd December 1996 on the balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process (COM(2000) 120 – 2000/2117(COS)).

At the sitting of 3 May 2000 the President of Parliament announced that she had referred the report to the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities as the committee responsible (C5-0210/2000).

The Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities had appointed Anna Karamanou rapporteur at its meeting of 26 January 2000.

The committee considered the Commission report and the draft report at its meetings of 9 October 2000 and 22 November 2000.

At the latter meeting it adopted the motion for a resolution by 16 votes to 4.

The following were present for the vote: Maj Britt Theorin, chairperson; Jillian Evans, vice-chairperson; Anna Karamanou, rapporteur; María Antonia Avilés Perea, Lone Dybkjær, Geneviève Fraisse, Lissy Gröner, Hedwig Keppelhoff-Wiechert (for Marielle de Sarnez pursuant to Rule 153(2)), Christa Kläß, Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou, Astrid Lulling, Thomas Mann, Emilia Franziska Müller, Christa Prets, Amalia Sartori, Karin Scheele (for Eryl Margaret McNally), Patsy Sørensen, Catherine Stihler (for Fiorella Ghilardotti pursuant to Rule 153(2)), Joke Swiebel and Helena Torres Marques.

The report was tabled on 4 December 2000.

The deadline for tabling amendments will be indicated in the draft agenda for the relevant part-session.

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

European Parliament resolution on the Commission report on the implementation of Council Recommendation 96/694 of 2nd December 1996 on the balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process (COM(2000) 120 – C5-0210/2000 – 2000/2117(COS))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission report (COM(2000) 120 – C5-0210/2000¹),
- having regard to the Council recommendation 96/694/EC,
- having regard to Articles 2, 3(2), 13, 137(1) and 141(4) of the EC Treaty,
- having regard to its resolutions based on reports from the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities since 1984 and especially its resolution of 2 March 2000² on women in decision-making,
- having regard to the final declaration of the UN Conference in Mexico in 1975,
- having regard to the Vienna Conference on human rights and the Platform for Action following the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing on 15 September 1995,
- having regard to the Council Resolution of 27 March 1995³ on balanced participation of women and men in decision-making,
- having regard to the ministerial declaration of 17 April 1999 in Paris on women and men in power,
- having regard to its two previous resolutions of 11 February 1994⁴ and 24 May 1996⁵ on women's representation in decision-making based on reports from the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities,
- having regard to the work done by the European Network "Women in Decision-Making" during the years 1992-1996,
- having regard to the European Third and Fourth Action Programmes (1991-2000) for equal opportunities between men and women,
- having regard to the final document of the UN Conference "Beijing + 5" in New York, June 2000,

¹ Not yet published in OJ.

² Not yet published in OJ.

³ OJ C 168, 4.7.1995, p.3.

⁴ OJ C 61, 28.2.1994, p.248.

⁵ OJ C 166, 10.6.1996, p.269.

- having regard to Rule 47(1) of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities (A5-0373/2000),
- A. whereas women's rights are an integral part of human rights,
 - B. whereas women make up at least half of the electorate in almost all countries and have attained the right to vote and hold office in almost all State Members of the UN, women continue to be seriously under-represented as candidates for public office,
 - C. whereas it is important not only to increase women's participation in decision-making processes but also to raise their role in society,
 - D. whereas women face a double disadvantage: discrimination throughout their professional career and the assumption of family tasks and responsibilities, and have to reconcile both family tasks and responsibilities and their professional career,
 - E. whereas inequality between women and men, and the prevailing gender roles are rooted in obsolete structures and traditional attitudes,
 - F. whereas it is admitted that the under representation of women in decision-making bodies represents an important obstacle to the democratic development of the European Union, to its cohesion and globally to its competitiveness,
 - G. whereas the proportion of women in decision-making positions within European industry and the trade union movement is alarmingly low, which undoubtedly contributes towards inequality on the employment market,
 - H. whereas the need to promote women's participation in the decision-making process as a condition for democracy, has been fully recognised both at national and European level,
 - I. whereas public and private institutions should set realistic targets for correcting gender imbalances, and support equality of opportunities for men and women,
 - J. deeply regretting this persistent inequality and discrimination both in politics and in the public and private institutions, despite the numerous political statements, declarations and commitments made at national, European and international level,
 - K. noting that the Amsterdam Treaty provided the legal basis and allows for positive actions and horizontal gender mainstreaming measures in order to continue the fight against inequalities in all policy fields,
 - L. whereas women's salaries continue to be lower than men's for work of equal value,
 - M. whereas women's representation in elected political assemblies has proved to be positively influenced by the electoral system of proportional representation as compared to the majority system,
 - N. whereas, at European level, the balanced participation of women and men in positions of power and centres of decision-making is regarded as a matter of democratic principle and

is included in the Charter of Fundamental Rights,

- O. whereas the representation of women in the political sphere has modestly progressed since the 1999 European elections, however, women are still under-represented both in the administrative and in the political decision-making sphere of the EU institutions,
 - P. welcoming the example of the European Parliament where female representation among its Members steadily increases and, since the last elections, accounts for almost 30%,
 - Q. whereas the full establishment of democracy presupposes collaboration and joint decision-making by the two sexes in all spheres, on an equal and mutually supportive basis,
 - R. whereas women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for justice or democracy but also a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account, to address women's gender-specific concerns, and experiences,
 - S. whereas more fairly shared work and parental responsibilities between women and men promote women's increased participation in public life,
 - T. noting that the consideration of women's different set of principles, ideas, values and experience can contribute to redefining political priorities, placing new items on the political agenda and provide new perspectives on mainstream political issues,
1. Reiterates the Council Recommendation 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;
 2. Reiterates its above mentioned resolutions of 11 February 1994, 24 May 1996 and 2 March 2000;
 3. Reiterates the need for a EU comprehensive integrated strategy and positive measures for the promotion of a gender balanced participation in democratic institutions and in all decision-making centres;
 4. Reiterates the need to mobilise all actors in economic and social life in order to achieve an equal share of responsibility between men and women in the public and private domains, in economic, political and family life;
 5. Reiterates the importance of achieving the goal of equal participation of men and women in the decision-making process in order to strengthen democracy, by taking account of the interests of the whole of society, and promote its proper functioning;
 6. Calls for the promotion and systematic collection and publication of comparable statistics at national and European level and the harmonization of the Member States' research methods for a clearer picture of men/women representation in decision-making, since dissemination of these statistics contributes to developing awareness of gender issues and helps progress;
 7. Calls for the promotion of a gender balance in all policy fields and all committees at EU,

national and international level, a balance which should not be below 40% representation for each gender;

8. Reiterates the importance of tackling gender stereotypes already at a very young age, and for both girls and boys to have the opportunity, throughout education, of discussing gender roles. Reiterates also the importance of women's training in leadership and decision-making, public speaking and self-assertion; also stresses the need to undertake awareness campaigns and encourage women's participation in the political arena;
9. Stresses the need to involve men in working towards greater equality since equality in decision-making can only be achieved by both sexes cooperating;
10. Calls for the necessity of establishing common structures and strategies for enforcing equal opportunities (e.g. Ministry for Equal Opportunities);
11. Reiterates the importance of there being more women in decision-making positions in companies and trade unions; therefore, calls on European industry and the trade union movement to take an active part in supporting women who want to make a career, and to combat stereotyping at work;
12. Calls for the creation of a European Network to promote women in decision-making and a network of national committees on equal opportunities;
13. Calls on the governments, especially those of countries where women's participation in decision-making bodies is lower than 30%, to review the differential impact of the electoral systems on the political representation of gender in elected bodies and consider the adjustment or reform of these systems and, if needed, take legislative measures or encourage political parties to introduce quota systems, such as the zipper system, and/or take other measures in order to promote a balance in participation;
14. Calls on the necessity to review parties structures and procedures to remove all barriers that directly or indirectly discriminate against the participation of women;
15. Recognises that countries with transitional economies and a fledgling democratic culture, such as many of the applicant countries, require particular attention and support owing to the disproportionately negative impact of the transitional process on women's lives;
16. Calls on the governments and the EU institutions to take due account of gender balance in appointing representatives and setting up international organisations or mediation and negotiating committees, particularly in peace processes or the settlement of conflicts;
17. Calls on the absolute necessity to take appropriate measures to reconcile family and professional life for men and women, through flexible management of working time and improved care provision for children and other dependants;
18. Calls on both sides of industry to promote the participation of women in their structures and in senior positions of responsibility;
19. Calls on the EU Member States to include in the next IGC amendments to the Treaty, in order to promote a gender balance in the EU institutions and all decision-making bodies;

20. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the other EU institutions, and the government and parliaments of the Member States.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Introduction

History: evolution of women's participation in the decision-making process.

The history of women's human rights is very recent. It was not until the beginning of the 19th century in Europe that women started to emerge from darkness and appear in the limelight of public life. Quite paradoxically, the transition to democracy, which coincided with the industrial revolution and the enlightenment in Europe, did not actually lead to the recognition of women as equal human beings to men. During the French Revolution, Olympe de Gouze was beheaded, since she dared ask equal rights for women. It was only after many years' struggles, that women, having overcome their traditional role, finally achieved, at least in legal terms, their full recognition as political human beings, equal to men. The recognition of women's human and political rights, their massive participation in educational and economic activities, changes in the social roles of the two sexes, as well as in the family structures, are all factors that constitute the greatest peaceful social revolution in the history of humanity. The 20th century began with the demand of women for equal access in education, paid employment and politics and ended with the claim for a fair and balanced gender participation in the democratic institutions and political decision-making process.

It is a fact that Aristotelian theory of the division of life into two spheres, that is the private and the public, has had a profound impact upon philosophical discourse, social structures, political thought and analyses for traditional issues and values, such as freedom, equality and justice, throughout the centuries. Women are absent from the classical texts of political thought, whilst political analysts up until recently have made no reference to inequalities between men and women in their analyses. Even today, some remain completely silent on these issues, perhaps due to their total inability to sufficiently explain historical degradation, marginalisation, deprivation of women from basic human rights and their confinement into the sphere of private life.

Feminism, as a social theory of the equality for men and women and as a movement fighting for the participation of women in economic, social and political life, emerged in Europe in the 19th century. At the same time, the socialist and trade-unionist movements played a protagonistic role in the demands for social emancipation in Europe. However, society was examined mainly in economic terms and all other issues were considered of secondary importance. As a result, any discussion as regards women's rights was considered a threat to the unity of the movement and as a disorientation away from the main enemy, capitalism. Gender oppression was basically missing from the social and political agenda of mass movements, which actually failed, at least in the early years, to acknowledge the importance of gender equality and recognise women's rights as human rights.

However, in the last forty years, there have been dramatic changes in attitudes, mentality and structures: women have succeeded in exiting the simple domestic sphere and enter the professional world, obtaining increasing responsibilities in their professional life, education, associative activities, etc. Certainly, asymmetry still persists to women's disadvantage, but things are concretely moving on. However, the political sphere is still remaining a domain to be conquered.

Unfortunately, the apparent increase in women's participation in educational and economic life were accompanied neither by redistribution of family responsibilities nor by representation of women in democratic institutions and political decision-making process. Political reality today denotes a serious deficit in terms of democracy, as the majority of the electorate, is either a minority or absent from the political decision-making centres altogether. It is obvious that what the Greek historian Thukededis had written 2.500 years ago, namely "The City Belongs to Men", still remains valid today and constitutes the basic principle of the structure and operation of our political system. At the same time, continuing direct and indirect discriminations and inequalities in the labour market at the expense of women, high unemployment rates, inadequate social infrastructure, unequal distribution of time and responsibilities between men and women, violence and sexual harassment, the portrayal of distorted stereotypes by the mass media and the double standards of sexual morality, still existing in many European regions, are all problems that are dialectically connected to the low participation or to the exclusion of women from economic and political power structures.

Today's modest women representation, where political decisions are taken, has been obtained only thanks to Women's movement and to measures such as the implementation of equal opportunities policies, positive action measures, preference principle and the introduction of quotas. A rapid overview of women's achievements in the professional world outlines the diversity of acquisitions according to the field and country under examination.

Among the major milestones of the 20th Century, we shall recall the 1949 International Conventions-which permitted the first breakthrough towards a judicial system safeguarding gender equality in various fields such as education, employment and political rights- and the United Nations' Conferences on Women in Mexico City 1975, in Nairobi Kenya 1985, in Beijing China 1995, in New York USA June 2000, establishing the principle of equal opportunities and declaring that Women's Rights are Human Rights.

However, 25 years after the first UN Conference, the statistical picture for women's participation at high levels of decision-making remains bleak. Since the end of the Second World War, 28 women have been elected as Heads of Government or have served as Head of State. Paradoxically, the highest proportion of women decision-makers has been registered in Asia (Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and Pakistan). As far as Europe is concerned, only the Scandinavian countries so far have achieved a gender equality at cabinet level.

The record world average of women's representation in Parliaments was reached in 1988 with a 14.8 % participation which has dropped today to 13.4%, clearly setting women in a special ad hoc category rather than as half of human mankind.

Part I **The European situation today-The European Policy**

The examination of the European policy for equal opportunities deserves particular attention, as European Union constitutes an institutional framework within which member states can stimulate action and take up initiatives. The contribution of the European Union to the promotion of equal opportunities has been profound over the last 40 years. Since its creation, the European Community has recognised the principle of equal pay (Treaty of Rome, 1957)

and on this basis, has developed a consistent set of legal provisions aimed at guaranteeing equal rights for men and women in all spheres of life.

The Treaty of Amsterdam, which has been put into effect since 1 May 1999, has strengthened the legal framework within which gender equality has been placed and has stated for first time that gender equality is a key priority of the European Union and member states. The Council Recommendation (02/12/1996) recognised that the balanced participation of men and women in decision-making is a prerequisite for democracy to function properly, pointing thus the way to gender equality forward and asking all member states to adopt strategies that would promote equal opportunities in the political-decision making process.

Great disparities, however, exist between Member States. The average percentage of women is of 24.5% in Governments and of 22.5 % in national Parliaments, with extremely large disparities among Member States; it is sufficient to mention 10.3 % participation scored in Greece (updated with the last elections) compared to 43.6 % participation scored in Sweden. The best scores are obtained in countries with longstanding traditions of equal opportunities policies, such as Sweden and Finland, whose representation in government is respectively of 52.6 % and 44.4%.

A good example is the UK whose strong legislation on equality has helped women make progress at a number of levels and today it scores the fourth highest female labour force participation rate in the EU (53 % active women in the labour market). However, women still remain severely underrepresented in leadership and decision making roles.

Efforts and results in the European Union

It is worthwhile mentioning the efforts and 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 and from 11% to 23% in the Member States governments. Today, the European Commission counts five women Commissioners and the European Parliament scores a female political representation of 30% women MEPs.

The Union's efforts can be divided into two main phases:

1. The first phase running from 1991 to 1995 concerns the adoption of the Third Action Programme on Equal Opportunities (1991-1995), which led to the experts network "Women in Decision-Making" to the Athens Declaration in 1992, the Charter of Rome in 1996 and the Beijing Platform of Action in 1995.
2. The second phase running from 1996 to 2000 concerns the adoption of the Council Recommendation 84/6635/EEC in 1996 on the promotion of positive action for achieving a gender balance in decision -making process, and the Fourth Framework Programme on Equal Opportunities (1996-2000).

The first phase thanks to the hard work of the European Network : "Women in Decision-Making" (1992-1996) created a favourable environment for raising consciousness on the necessity of addressing the issue of gender balance in decision-making, whereas the second one, as a follow up on the positive results obtained, explicitly set political decision-making as

a major priority.

The Paris Conference in 1999 on “Women and Men in Power: a caring society, a dynamic economy, a vision for Europe”, was the follow-up of the Athens and Rome European Conferences. It mainly focused on all the questions, problems and solutions on a gender balance in decision making and recognised the necessity of speeding up efforts.

Three years after the adoption of the Council Recommendation, in October 1999, nine indicators were established by the Council for measuring progress in women’s participation in power structures. The indicators showed that participation is far from being sufficient both at national and EU level. The Recommendation had not been fully implemented. Moreover, it was established that the goal of a minimum of 1/3 of women at all levels of power and decision-making would constitute a good starting point.

Efforts and results in the Member States.

As far as progress made by Member States is concerned, the Commission report collects information provided by the Member States on their 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.

Unfortunately, the picture provided by the Commission report 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 draftsperson considers this communication insufficient to establish correctly any progress achieved. Should we then interpret the absence of answers from certain Member States as a non- implementation of the Council Recommendation? This solution being even less satisfactory than the first one, the draftsperson suggests that 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.

The Communication highlights as first problem, the lack of a definition on “balanced participation”. In fact, the Council Recommendation mentions the need to reach such a target without however, defining in figures the term "balanced". Would this amount to 50% as a few Member States propose (Scandinavian countries and United Kingdom) or would it rather amount to a critical mass of a minimum of 1/3 as the rest of the Union wishes to understand? At this point it seems clear that an ambitious definition needs to be adopted.

Concerning the first priority, the Communication shows that Member States have adopted a series of measures, such as legislation on gender balance, both at national and local level, training, information campaigns etc. However, despite these efforts, results obtained do not match with the initial expectations. It seems that a specific strategy establishing a common

European approach would constitute a first step in the right direction. As far as enforcement mechanisms are concerned, all Member States have created one. Some countries have a Commission responsible for gender equality (Austria, Ireland, United Kingdom and Luxembourg) others have charged a Ministry (Italy, France, Belgium and Germany).

As far as the second priority is concerned, some progress has been achieved through the sensitisation of the education sector (schools, universities, media) and through a specially designed campaign addressed to the private sector highlighting the advantages of adopting an equal opportunities policy.

The third priority called for an improvement on statistical data. Member States have tried to harmonise the data research methods, mainly through transnational co-operation. As a result, annual or bi-annual reports are published (Denmark, Finland, Austria, Sweden) and updated statistics have been created (Ireland, Belgium, Greece, Germany, Luxembourg, United Kingdom, and Spain).

Finally, concerning the last priority, a clear picture could be established on progress achieved. Information supplied confirms not only large disparities but also different degrees of effort made. The only country that has binding legislation requiring gender balance in political lists of candidates is Belgium, where women must account for at least one third. Austria and Germany have no binding legislation on this matter, but their political parties have committed themselves to increase the number of women on their lists through either quotas or targets. A few countries have tried to modify the Constitution or introduce new legislation. We shall mention the positive outcome obtained in France and Portugal in opposition to Luxembourg's failure. Progress has also been achieved in Italy thanks to the adoption of a policy guaranteeing female presence in public life, in Greece thanks to the introduction of quotas in some parties and the campaign of the Greek Political Association of Women, and finally, in Ireland through funding to promote female participation in political activity.

We can conclude that, 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.

Part II

Solutions and Proposals for a higher participation of women

Although the number of women working in the administration is high, sometimes even higher than men, most of the decision-making posts are held by men. However, it is not only a matter of increasing the number of women, but more a problem of elevating their role in society and assessing the quality of work they are asked to supply. In order to increase the number of women in public life, a variety of strategies aimed at greater participation for women can be summarised under the heading "positive measures".

Achieving a balance between men and women in politics, the traditional gender role of reproduction and housekeeping seems one of the hardest barriers to overcome. In this respect, working time patterns and party and government structures are problems to be addressed. Both men and women should assume an equal share of responsibility in the public and private domains, in economic, political and family life.

Secondly, discriminatory attitudes and practices in the political sphere should be reduced, opening both mentalities and party lists to women. Party structures and selection process should be revised in order to abolish psychological and practical barriers to women's participation in politics.

To overcome a lack of self-confidence based on a purely psychological level, due to a lack of appropriate educational background and to a negative historical cultural background, it would be most appropriate to increase women's capacity to participate in leadership through the development of career training, including training in leadership and decision-making, public speaking and self-assertion as well as political campaigning and other appropriate programmes for their advancement.

Moreover, the differential impact of electoral systems on the political representation of women in elected bodies, which influences greatly the outcome of electoral results, should be adjusted without delay. Through examination of statistical data at European level it becomes apparent that those Member states with the highest levels of female representation (Sweden, Finland, Denmark and the Netherlands) are those experiencing a proportional or mixed electoral system with lists of candidates. Consequently, the Member states with the lowest levels of female representation (Greece, France and United Kingdom) experience majority or electoral systems with the preference vote. Measures should also be taken in order to encourage political parties to integrate women in elective positions in the same proportion and at the same level as men.

Among the most common measures known to increment women's participation, we shall recall the use of quotas or targets, voluntarily or legally enforced to ensure numerical and executive female representation, especially with regard to placement on electoral lists. Parties with an internal quota system undoubtedly have a larger number of women elected, however, quotas cannot be seen as being a complete solution as women are most often placed in ineligible places. Quotas should be accompanied by other measures, such as placement of women in high ranking or the "zipper" system, which consists of an alternation of man/woman on the list.

Another interesting action is the introduction of a regulation in the law of public financing to the parties, which foresees an increased share of financing for each female candidate in party lists. In other words, this corresponds to a financial premium given to parties having a good female representation on their lists or sanctions to those with a small number of women (recently adopted in the French system).

Measures to increase women's participation in public life should absolutely be coupled by updated statistics and monitoring on a regular basis of women progress in political representation. Dissemination of quantitative and qualitative data on both genders at all levels in the private and public sectors, contribute to developing the necessary awareness that helps progress. Similarly, electoral campaigns should be coupled with public awareness campaigns, which could be translated into support to female candidates and encouragement to other women to join politics.

Part III

Advantages of women's participation in decision-making

Women's participation in political decision-making process is getting imperative, not only in the European Union, but in the world as a whole. The European Network "Women in Decision-Making" (1992-1996) has elaborated a number of arguments that account for the necessity of women's inclusion in political life and leadership:

1. Reinforcement of democracy

In any society, democracy is based upon the participation of all people in the process of decision-making. Women constitute half of the population and are entitled to be represented proportionately, in order for democracy to function properly.

2. Application of the principle of gender equality

Equality is a universal human right. The division of labour and the double standards should be abolished; both men and women are entitled to participate on equal terms in both private and public spheres, so that the historical exclusion of women be transcended.

3. Efficient use of human resources

Women constitute half of the world's pool of potential talent and ability and their under-representation deprives society of efficient use of human resources.

4. Enrichment of political culture with different interests and value systems

Women's historical exclusion from politics and their confinement into the private domain has led to gender differences in values and interests. In any democratic society political decisions should reflect the interests and values of all the people. Women's contribution accounts for a particular concern for justice, dialogue, an ethical dimension of politics, a talent for setting priorities, an awareness of the value of consensus, a facility for agreement due to a higher sense of social solidarity and a higher concern for future generations.

5. Rejuvenation of political culture

Women's different set of principles, ideas and values, are more compatible with the social needs and political climate of our times; women's participation in political life can contribute to redefining political priorities, placing new items on the political agenda and provide new perspectives on mainstream political issues.

CONCLUSION

The general need of promoting women in decision-making as a condition for democracy is fully recognised both at national and European level. The overall objective is to reach a gender balance, whereby men and women are equally represented and where both can participate in a fair way in terms of access and promotion. The problem lies not so much at the lower levels of the administration, but in high level positions, where real decision-making responsibilities lie.

Brave measures are necessary in order to achieve a solution to the problems and the contradictions arising from an "old-fashioned" outdated contract of the two sexes. This means that responsibilities within and outside the domestic place should be balanced and fairly shared on a daily basis and for life. It also means that a new institutional and social

framework should reflect the changes that have taken place to date, and will support the equality of opportunities for men and women in all spheres of private and public 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.

As professor Francis Fukuyama advocated in his article titled "If women ruled the world" : "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".