

Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting Session 9 | Women in Leadership: women's representation in policy and decision-making

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Good morning,

It is a pleasure and an honour to address you today, representing the European Women's Lobby (EWL).

With almost 30 years of existence, EWL is the largest umbrella organisation of women's associations in the European Union (EU), working to promote women's rights and equality between women and men. EWL's membership comprises of organisations in all 28 EU Member States and three candidate countries, as well as to 18 European-wide organisations, representing more than 2000 associations.

The under-representation of women constitutes a serious democratic deficit, which undermines the legitimacy of the contemporary democratic ideal. Parity democracy and the promotion of women in decision-making positions have been, therefore, important areas of action for EWL. **Parity democracy** implies the equal representation of women and men in decision-making positions. It goes a step further than quotas – which are a means to an end and not an end in itself - as it is based on the idea that **women are not a minority: we represent more than half of the humanity** – a quantitative dimension – and we are one of its components – a qualitative dimension.

25 years after the Beijing Platform for Action was adopted, where are we?

Overrepresentation of men

- As of August 2019, in the ECE Region, men made up 75 % of the **heads of state and heads of governments**¹; in the EU 71,5%;
- As of 1 June 2019, only 20 countries out of 56 across the ECE region had reached or surpassed the **30 percent target within national parliaments settled in 1995**. (IPU, 2019);

¹ 14 out of 56. These include: Austria (Head of Government), Canada (Head of State), Croatia (Head of State), Denmark (Head of State and Head of Government), Estonia (Head of State), Georgia (Head of State), Germany (Head of Government), Iceland (Head of Government), Norway (Head of Government), Republic of Moldova (Head of Government), Romania (Head of Government), Serbia (Head of Government), Slovakia (Head of State) and United Kingdom (Head of State).

- In the EU, the recently updated **EIGE Gender Equality Index** shows that in the domain of powerⁱ - which encompasses political, economic and social power – there was an improvement, but it remains the lowest score, 51,9²;

Economic decision is still largely in the hands of men:

- As of April 2019, the **boards of the largest publicly listed companies** registered in the EU Member States comprised only 27.7 % women;
- In 2018, women accounted for less than one fifth of the members of the top decision-making bodies of **employers' organisations** convened at both national and EU level (16.4 % and 19.1 % respectively);
- And let's not forget that the proposal for a **directive on Women on Boards** - something that women's organisations pushed very much forward - is blocked at the European Council since 2012.

2

Many other examples of the slow progress of women's representation in bodies of power could be provided...

Everything is interconnected: the deficit in women's participation in political and economic decision and many other instances of social power is related to gender norms and to the way **gender stereotypes** constrain equal participation of women – for example, the messages that we receive since childhood, from peers, the from education system and very importantly, from media. Just to give you an example: In the EU media, the boards of public authorities that broadcast TV, radio and other media to citizens feature only 35.8 % of women, according to EIGE data.

Let's remember it's a women's right to participate in political decision-making:

Besides, "Women in power and decision-making" is one of the twelve critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995)³, the most encompassing **programmatic agenda** at the UN level for women's empowerment:

(...) "women's equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account" (...)

² <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2019>

³ https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/pdfs/Beijing_Declaration_and_Platform_for_Action.pdf

it is also referred in articles 7 and 8⁴ of the 1979 legally binding United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the **legislative framework** at the UN level that goes hand in hand with the BPA:⁵

Article 7

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

(a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;

So, the issue is not only women's right to participate in political decision-making, but also the idea that **women are voters**⁶: and how to foster women's participation as voters in elections, how to have women feeling that voting has an impact, and **how voting for other women can make a difference**, because we know that some of the problems that are on the political agenda today, and which are decisive for the functioning of society, were and are still mainly introduced by women, such as male violence against women, against children, the issue of reconciliation between work, family and private life...

(b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;

And also, and this is a crucial dimension for women's human rights organisations:

(c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.

At the EU level, although there is no binding provision for the realisation of equality between women and men in political decision-making, EU institutions have been adopting nonbinding texts relating to gender equality in decision-making:

⁴ Article 8 - States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure to women, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination, the opportunity to represent their Governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations.

⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cedaw.aspx>

⁶ Before the EP elections an Eurobarometer showed that men vote more than women, youngsters under 25 vote less, self-employed, managers and other white collars vote more, people who drop off studies under 20 vote less. According to the Eurobarometer, interest in the European elections was also more widespread among those who are satisfied with the way democracy works in their country and in the EU.

- The Council Resolution on the balanced participation of men and women in decision-making (1995)
- The Council Recommendation on the balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process (1996)
- The European Parliament resolution on women in decision-making (2000)
- The Women's Charter adopted by the European Commission (2010)
- The EU Strategy for Equality between Women (2010-2015)
- The Strategic engagement for gender equality (2016-2019)
- Etc.

The Treaty of the European Union defines **equality between women and men as a value and an objective of the EU** and defines **gender mainstreaming in all areas as a horizontal principle**⁷. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights states in its article 23^o on equality between women and men that *Equality between men and women must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay. The principle of equality shall not prevent the maintenance or adoption of **measures providing for specific advantages in favour of the under-represented sex.***

These are **essential references for the women's movement**. These are the **standards** that we all abide for and that we all try to push forward, using different mechanisms: for instance, the **space** provided by the CEDAW Committee, when it analyses both the information provided by governments and by the women's organisations through shadow or parallel reports, before issuing final recommendations to a country. We use these spaces to shed light on the issues that **women and girls, of all ages, and in all our diversity**, face daily.

But we are living, in Europe, very different times from 1995:

Populism is on the rise in Europe. Flowing from fear, poverty, inequality, and growing global complexity, fuelled by manipulation of media and information, coalescing into a toxic blend of patriotism and patriarchy, tradition and nostalgia, with a particularly negative impact on women and girls.

At the same time, we are experiencing an unprecedented engagement in women's human rights, with women mobilising on the streets, on social media, across sectors and

⁷ The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union opens up the possibility (article 157§4), in my view, of fostering equality between women and men through positive action measures, gender quotas being an example.

4. *With a view to ensuring full equality in practice between men and women in working life, the principle of equal treatment shall not prevent any Member State from maintaining or adopting measures providing for specific advantages in order to make it easier for the underrepresented sex to pursue a vocational activity or to prevent or compensate for disadvantages in professional careers.*

borders and political divides, at the forefront of initiatives for a more sustainable and peaceful Europe.

The rise of anti-feminist movements, populism and regressive isolationist nationalism must be strongly addressed as it is **threatening the defense and implementation of our common *acquis* in terms of values and women's and girls' human rights**. In this context, more than ever, spaces and mechanisms like the one provided by CEDAW are paramount for women's human rights organisations, as spaces of voice and resistance.

We want more women elected for political office, and we want those elected women to provide a voice for all the other women and girls that don't have the opportunity to be there.

In the EU, we had elections in May for the European Parliament. In this context, the women's movement issued a Manifesto⁸, with our key demands for democracy in the EU, an **agenda to push forward a feminist Europe**, that takes in consideration the different needs of its citizens, women and men. A patriarchal culture is still very much embedded in the policies, the processes and the activities. Constraints to participation due to sexism coupled, many times, with racism and other forms of discrimination need to be tackled.

We need women elected to be aware that we trust them to put forward an agenda that can counteract something that is very damaging for women's and girls' rights. **We need to advance, and we need to do it in alliance.**

Both the BPA and the CEDAW Convention⁹ are very clear on the role of women's human rights and feminist organisations. The BPA states that:

(...) particularly women's organizations and feminist groups, have become a driving force for change. Non-governmental organizations have played an important advocacy role in advancing legislation or mechanisms to ensure the promotion of women. They have also become catalysts for new approaches to development. Many Governments have increasingly recognized the important role that non-governmental organizations play and the importance of working with them for progress. Yet, in some countries, Governments continue to restrict the ability of non-governmental organizations to operate freely.

⁸ https://womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/european_women_s_lobby_manifesto_2019_final_.pdf. This is a comprehensive summary of our feminist vision for the future of Europe. We want women to have the same opportunities as men in every situation, to have the place they deserve in decision-making and leadership positions. We want women to be totally independent economically, which is vital for every woman. We want to put an end to the violence women face every day in every part of Europe and we want women to be safe and live in dignity. We want women to be able to keep on fighting for their own rights by getting the funding they need and deserve for their organisations.

⁹ <https://www.ohchr.org/documents/HRBodies/CEDAW/Statements/NGO.pdf>

Women, through non-governmental organizations, have participated in and strongly influenced community, national, regional and global forums and international debates.

But, let's not forget, women's human rights organisations work, mostly, on a volunteering basis. To be able to be partners with you and to push forward the agenda, we need to have a basic structure that allow us to function regularly. We need to know that we can have **funding** for our activities that is not solely dependent on applying for projects. Most women's grass roots organisations at the local and national levels have many difficulties competing with large scale, established entities.

We have the feminist critical analysis and knowledge; our standards are women's and girls' human rights. We call for a **feminist leadership** where all women that are already in power can work with all of us. This means sisterhood, this means understanding the constraints that we face daily. And this means, as well, for us to find the **space to reinforce each other**. Networking is important, legislation is important, but the dimension of working in **partnership** is also to make progress.

It is time for a **reinvigorated political impetus to put women's and girls' rights and equality between women and men, boys and girls at the centre of the agenda**. It is time for urgent action: on European and member state level.

If we do nothing, we will need 190 years to achieve true equality between women and men. We cannot and will not wait. We want to create a momentum and a process with you to be able to see equality in our lifetime.

Thank you

A quarter of a century after the adoption of the BPA, “Why is politics not working for women? The 4 Cs”:

Traditionally research shows that women’s underrepresentation in politics boils down to:

- **Candidate** selection: once women agree to run, it’s often difficult for them to get an electable spot on the election list.
- **Culture**: politics is still a men’s world. Sexism, many times coupled with racism and other forms of discrimination, is rampant and external threats – such as women - are often not welcome.
- **Cash**: when women run for election, their campaigns often receive less funding than their male counterparts.
- **Childcare**, elderly care and other dependents: across the EU, women spend double the amount of time on childcare compared to men.

What can we do to support women in politics?

- **Confidence**: Invest in women. Set up ambitious training and mentoring programs.
 - **Candidate** selection: Establish quota or zipping system in order to ensure gender balanced lists. Head-hunt women candidates.
 - **Culture**: Establish a zero tolerance to sexism with clear channels to report sexual harassment.
 - **Cash**: Provide earmarked funding for women candidates until equal representation is reached.
 - **Childcare**, elderly care and other dependents: Change the “long hours” culture in politics. Provide care facilities.
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- **Binding provision to ensure the equal participation of women and men in any of the decision-making bodies – 50/50.** CEDAW General Recommendation 25 on temporary special measures (2004) states *Adoption by States parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination as defined in the present Convention, but shall in no way entail as a consequence the maintenance of unequal or separate standards; these measures shall be discontinued when the objectives of equality of opportunity and treatment have been achieved.*
 - **Gender stereotypes and sexism**: Address and tackle the gender norms, attitudes and stereotypes hindering women’s equal participation in decision making

positions. Gender stereotypes and perceptions in relation to women in politics prevail due to persistent gendered attributes and competences associated to politicians which constitute an obstacle either to women's entrance or permanence in politics. Simultaneously address and tackle the gender norms, attitudes and stereotypes hindering men's participation in care and private life with integrated policies aimed at promoting a balance between work and family life for both women and men. Article 5 of CEDAW states: *"States Parties shall take all appropriate measures: (a) To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women;*

- **European and national political mentoring network:** Mentoring programmes for young women and inexperienced women from all backgrounds in political decision-making at national (political parties) and EU level (European Parliament) complemented with training and capacity-building on subjects such as women's human rights, gender equality, leadership and decision-making, public speaking, stakeholders' analysis and alliances, with the participation and visibility of feminist women role models in politics and from civil society.
- **Foster political will within political parties, empowering women's groups:** Indexing state subventions to political parties to the balanced participation of women and men at all levels of decision-making and electoral lists, through the means of implementation of gender equality auditing and the introduction of term-limits to elected candidates; have mandatory zipper systems (one man/one woman or vice-versa) for all closed lists (electoral, nominations and appointments) and rejection of uncompliant lists.
- **Training and awareness raising campaigns:** Develop training and awareness raising initiatives on women's participation in political decision-making and leadership, targeted to specific groups, such as decision-makers and the media, highlighting the case for making women's political participation and representation a factual and visible reality. Campaign for women to vote for other women to have women's concerns and needs raised.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Guarantee countries' due diligence with international commitments such as CEDAW, in particular its articles 5,7 and 8, by establishing parity observatories responsible for monitoring the implementation of the applicable measures and with competences and political mandates to develop



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recommendations to political parties, governments, and other relevant stakeholders.

- **Support networks for women in political positions.**