

“WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE”

5th May 2009, Prague

Conference report



The “Women in public life” conference took place in the Main Hall of the Senate of Parliament of the Czech Republic on May 5th, 2009, from 10,00-14,00.

The conference was organized in cooperation with Ms Alena Gajduskova, 1st Deputy Chairwoman of the Senate, and facilitated by Michaela Marksova Tominova, Chairwoman of Association of Equal Opportunities.

After the conference, she also organized an event for a group of important Czech women – a lecture “Women in the Global Crisis”, given by the Czech writer and sociologist living in Germany, Alena Wagnerova.

The conference was opened by Ms Alena Gajduskova. She talked about her experiences in politics and emphasised the role of the Senate. As the election system is the majority one, the candidates have to fight individually on their own for winning the elections. She said that she became involved in local politics already before ´89 thanks to her nomination at the Czech Women´s Union. After that, she continued working in politics and she successfully won her seat in the elections twice. Although her mandate was and is very strong (meaning that the number of votes was big compared to other senators), it was very difficult for her to become Chairwoman of the Social Democratic (CSSD) club in the Senate and later the Vice-Chairwoman, because her male colleagues lapped her several times.

Kvetoslava Korinkova, former Federal Minister of Control hold a speech entitled: „Experiences from 20 years of public activity in the Czech Republic“. She talked about the early 90ies, when she became the Federal Minister – after 7 male candidates refused taking this position. Although she is a specialist in the field of transport, during her term of office she started to take part in international events about women’s rights (on behalf of the government). Later, when she worked as elected politician at the City Council of Prague, she was immediately given the social issues, just because she was a woman.

Alexandra Jachanova Dolezelova, Chairwoman of the Czech Women´s Lobby, talked about „Participation of Women in Decision Making Processes in the Czech Republic“. She presented numbers of women in both Chambers of the Czech Parliament and in the

regional and municipal levels. She also presented number of women (and their positions) on the EP candidate lists.

Marie Jilkova, Chairwoman of Association of Women from Christian Democratic Union-Czechoslovakian People’s Party (KDU-CSL) gave a speech on „Christian Democratic Party-Party of Paradoxes”. This party has a biggest percentage of women (about 50%). The reason for this is the fact that traditionally if a man became a member, the whole family follows. The party also has the biggest share of women at the municipal level of all parties (the first place is taken by “independent” groups). But it was very difficult to start to discuss women’s issues inside the party – nobody ever wanted to hear about it during 90ies, in was considered “feminist” and therefore wrong. The Association of Women was founded only 2 years ago, when the atmosphere changed. Now it is one of few parties for the EP elections who’s leader is a woman.



Monika MacDonagh-Pajerova, Chairwoman of Ano pro Evropu, talked about „Role of Women in Civil Society Building in the EU”. She named several women active in the dissident movement before ´89 and described the process of how these women were pushed out of the politics after ´89. She also mentioned the necessity of strong female solidarity, that e. g. female MPs have to work together cross parties, but this is not happening in the Czech Republic: there are so few women in the Parliament, that most of them work together with their male colleagues and are afraid of being “too feminist” and to work together with women from other parties.

Recommendations and Conclusions from the speeches and the following discussion

The responses to the question: “Which measures can make the situation of Czech women in decision making processes better?” were diverse:

- Women have to focus on particular themes, mostly those left out by the male politicians (family issues, children rights, elderly people etc.) and through these themes they have to work in political parties – after some time, men will understand their importance and put them easily on the eligible places on the candidate lists.
- As the experiences from the CSSD party shows (the only party applying internal quotas for many years), internal quotas and discussions about them do not

automatically mean that there are more women on the candidate lists. Women (together with supportive men) have to introduce legal quotas on the candidate

lists, because this is the only way to get more women in Parliament. The solution is either to pass a law or to leave it to single parties to organise their own candidate lists quotas.



At 1 p. m., there was a press conference: Ms Gajduskova, Pajerova and Wagnerova took part in it. Monika Pajerova introduced the Schuman Foundation project. After that, all of them repeated main ideas from their speeches.

From 2,30 p. m., a group of women – some of which took part in the conference – joined the other event: lecture of Alena Wagnerova and closing refreshment hosted by Ms Gajduskova.