

Women's participation in the social and political life of Europe

Mai 25, 2009, Athens

Conference Report

This report is based on the proceedings of the Conference on "Women's participation in the social and political life of Europe" which was organized by the Constantinou Karamanlis Institute for Democracy in Athens on 25 May 2009. The speakers of the conference were: Ms. Rodi Kratsa-Tsangaropoulou (MEP, Vice President of the European Parliament), Ms. Olga Kefalogianni (MP), Ms. Eugenia Tsoumani-Spentza (General Secretary for Gender Equality) and Dr. Zacharoula Karagiannopoulou (Visiting Lecturer at Panteion University). The discussion' moderator was Dr. Nikolaos Tzifakis (Lecturer at the University of Peloponnese). Among the 250 persons attending the conference, there were representatives of women organizations and other NGOs, policy makers and university students. The presentations were structured around two major topics: Institutional practice and theoretical approaches.

Institutional practice in EU

The first speaker, Ms. Rodi Kratsa pointed out that Gender balance in decision making is a determined goal of the European Union, and that recommendations on the introduction of legal, regulatory and incentive measures aimed at redressing the under-representation of women in decision making have been adopted by all EU's major institutions.

She referred to the European Commission's road map for equality between men and women for 2006–10, which includes the promotion of equal representation of women and men in decision making as one of the six priority areas for action. All within the framework of the recognition of equality between women and men as one of the fundamental principles of the Community laid down in the treaties ever since the Amsterdam Treaty.

The speaker proceeded to an analysis of the role and action of the EU Parliament and the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality for the promotion of gender equality in the field of political representation. The main conclusion was that the political parties are the gatekeepers for women's representation, while gender equality issues should be shifted on political agendas.

Institutional practice in Greece

Ms. Olga Kefalogianni and Ms. Eugenia Tsoumani-Spentza presented an overview of the deficiencies in the functioning of democracy due to the existing inequality. Moreover, Ms. Eugenia Tsoumani-Spentza presented the national (Greek) strategy and the measures, which have been introduced and are aimed at:

- Prevention and elimination of the violence against women
- Overcoming gender stereotypes (gender sensitive education)
- Enforcing equal opportunities for women and men in the Labor Market (combat unemployment and discrimination, remove invisible barrier/glass ceiling, harmonize working and family life, wages gap, etc.)
- Increasing women's political representation

Theoretical approaches

Female under-representation in politics is a fact and the 'proposals' (quotas or parity) regarding the recruit of a balanced number of women and men in politics is a much debated issue within EU political parties and feminist research.

Dr. Zacharoula Karagiannopoulou presented and analyzed the pros and cons regarding the implementation of quotas or parity. She also pointed out that opinions vary in terms of effects and repercussions as well as concerning the meaning of key concepts in political analysis, such as 'equality', 'representation' and 'rights'.