



## Gender equality in Romanian politics – Obstacles and Challenges

### May 14<sup>th</sup>, Bucharest

### Conference Conclusions



The conference, organized by the Ithaka Foundation, in partnership with the Robert Schumann Foundation, is part of a European effort; coordinated by the Robert Schumann Foundation and focussing on five countries: the Czech Republic, France, Greece, Romania and Spain.

The Bucharest event, benefiting the presence of Mr. Jean-

Dominique Giuliani, President of the Robert Schumann Foundation, has gathered the most prominent women figures in the Romanian politics, such as: Mrs. Roberta Alma Anastase, the President of the Chamber of Deputies, Mrs. Anca Boagiu, the Vice President of the Romanian Senate, Mrs. Maria Mota, the President of the National Agency for Gender Equality, Mrs. Cristina Pocora, the President of the Gender Equality Commission in the Chamber of Deputies and former member of the European Parliament, Gabriela Cretu. These high profile political figures have expressed their opinions in respect to gender equality in Romania and the challenges that women face when entering the political arena.

Mrs. Ramona Calin, President of the Ithaka Foundation and host of the event, welcomed the guests and raised the first topic of discussion, reckoning that in comparison to other European nations, Romania has only a handful of women involved in politics and holders of key positions in state institutions. "If we make a comparison to other European states, where the average of women presence on the political arena is around 25%, Romania can only report half of that average. Even states from Africa and Asia report more favourable statistics, around 16%. In accordance with the European Institutions, the Ithaka Foundation works to promote women participation in politics and this event is yet another step in our commitment", stated Mrs. Calin.



The message of Mr. Jean-Dominique Giuliani, President of the Robert Schumann Foundation, came to strengthen the importance of the event, by acknowledging the crucial role that women play in the European construction and politics overall. "I believe that women are much more competent, as opposed to men, when engaging in political confrontations. This is why there are so many women active



in the European Parliament. We need to work effortlessly to determine people to vote in these European elections, as every gender equality regulation will be decided in the European Parliament, to be implemented thereafter in member states."

Mrs. Roberta Anastase, President of the Romanian Chamber of Deputies considers that the Romanian political environment has been dominated by the model of the "politician's wife" a role model which was no longer useful for the society, nor for the women involved in politics. However she pointed out that most of those women who ran for office, in the latest legislative elections, succeeded to win, that which proves that old prejudice that Romanians did not vote for women, were a bit over rated. They existed to a certain extent, but this did not mean they could not be surpassed. "Politics is a tough competition, tougher than many other fields", has concluded Mrs. Anastase.



Mrs. Anca Boagiu, Vice-President of the Senate has highlighted the fact that even though there were many women in key positions, both in the executive and the legislative, the quota were very low and has kept Romania at the end of the ranking in respect to women' participation in politics. "I still believe that we haven't won the battle, the process of acknowledging women in politics is yet to



continue. And in order to do this, women need to stay the

course, in the middle of a storm", said Anca Boagiu.

Mrs. Maria Mota, President of the National Agency for Gender Equality, strengthened Mrs' Boagiu's point of view and has reckoned that the topic of gender equality still does not enjoy the attention it should from the authorities. However, through the activity of the agency she currently presides, she did succeed to impose some legislative breakthroughs to insure a better representation of women in both Parliament and the Government, starting with the next electoral cycle in 2012. Mrs. Mota publicly expressed her support for the event organized by the Ithaka Foundation, viewing it as part of a very useful campaign, in support of women participation in politics.

Mrs. Cristina Pocora, President of the Gender Equality Commission in the Chamber of Deputies further acknowledged the importance of legislative initiative. She has presented the hard reality that women face in today's Romania, where many cases of domestic violence against women and children are still often times reported. Legislation regulating this unfortunate reality is still scarce, poorly drafted and lacks any power of implementation, being imported from foreign countries, without being adapted to national realities. It is therefore the mission of the Gender Equality Commission in the Chamber of Deputies and other bodies to remedy the situation.

Mrs. Gabriela Cretu, former member of the European Parliament has raised the issue of education, in relation to the discrimination of women in the society and in politics, in this respect. Mrs. Cretu considered that not only the mass media or the political class were to blame for the current situation but also the way we understood education, as it were taught in schools, that kind of education that we very much need to build sound citizenship. Moreover, in order to ensure a balanced presence of women and men in state institutions, quotas were, in her opinion a necessary solution.

The conference participants have also analyzed the position of women in the Romanian society, beyond their presence in the Romanian politics. To this end, high level representative figures from the business sector brought their input to the discussion. Mrs. Maria Toghina, President of the National Radio, Mrs. Rodica Nicolae, Editor in chief of Careers Magazine, and Mrs. Violeta Constantinescu, Director of Pancolor took part in the second panel of discussions.

Mrs. Maria Toghina, President of the National Radio, has focussed her presentation on the fact that Romanians continue to live in a society governed by men and when a woman succeeded to hold a leading position in important businesses, she would need to work twice as hard as women



were still facing distrust, often times. Speaking from her personal experience, Mrs. Toghina has reckoned that she was working three times harder than any men that led the institution during its 80 years of existence, but her message was optimistic: “we all know that women are not weak, that they are much stronger than those men sitting besides them and that intelligence, intuition and sensitivity are indestructible “weapons” for women manager. Women in positions of power would give just as much attention to people they work with, as to the objective of making profit. This was the philosophy which has motivated the team that she has led successfully.

Mrs. Rodica Nicolae – Editor in chief of “Careers” Magazine, believed that women who hold high level positions were the mirror of the current Romanian society. She has offered a revelatory



example in this regard: “if one wanted better food on the table, one needed to bring better ingredients.” However, thanks to the self regulatory mechanism, the society would bring forward the middle class, which was our hope for a better selection pool. Thus, in time, current poor representation in politics is to change.

Mrs. Violeta Constantinescu - a success story in Romanian business, is the Director and founder of a prominent luxury home wear company, reckoned that women engage in huge efforts to build their own companies, in a well deserved desire to conquer their freedom. Thus, they have the satisfaction of creating a system from scratch; creating jobs, making profit. This type of enterprise demands sacrifice, sometimes frustration, but the ultimate result was worthwhile. Mrs. Constantinescu, a former representative of the Democratic party in its hey days stated that the reason she had preferred business to politics was the higher chances to an environment cleaner of the “noxes” of incompetence and low quality staff. Her message was to encourage more women to succeed in the business, more competitive environment.

Mrs. Elena Nedelcu, Professor at the Nicolae Titulescu University made quite some thorough observations regarding women participation at the higher level of representation in the Romanian



society. According to her, girls needed to be encouraged to participate even since childhood in the decision making process both in schools and in their families. If children are used to take action, at school or at home, this would engage them more responsibly during adulthood. Therefore, they would become more active in social life, and assume leadership positions and political action. If they were to learn to negotiate during childhood, if they learned to compromise, to take stand, their behaviour later on would not be as passive, later in life".

The third panel focussed on the creation and development of networks of women in politics (from



civil society, mass-media and the private sector). The debate reunited Mrs. Mariana Nitelea, Director of the Information Bureau of the European Council, Mrs. Mihaela Miroiu, Professor at the National School of Political and Administrative Studies, Mrs. Georgeta Ionescu, Senior Counsellor at the Romanian Government and Mrs. Sandra Pralong, President and CEO of Synergy Communications.

Mrs. Mariana Nitelea, Director of the Information Bureau of the European Council believes that the highest potential of the May 14<sup>th</sup> event would consist in the creation of a networking group of women, which could lead the conference topic into an effective direction and impose action in order to gain those rights for women, which were highly necessary in any democratic society, and which could be of use for all women in Romania. „These rights could only be gained if we fought for them. A serious lobby pressure needs to converge, at both the executive and educational level. She hoped that this meeting represented the start of this lobby – along with the society-at-large , the mass-media, the political spectrum, the institutions and the private sector, in order to benefit of a unified effort”, considered Mrs. Mariana Nitelea.





Mrs. Mihaela Miroiu, the most reputed feminine voice in Romanian Academia, a Professor at the National School of Political and Administrative Studies, has proposed the creation of a **Women Pact**, with an agenda of objectives regarding the compulsory state policies concerning gender equality. According to her, this solution would represent an effective outcome of the event: „In our capacity of citizens and contributors we



have the right to take part in the decision making process” – has stated Mrs. Miroiu. She has highlighted the fact that the political history of women was still young in Romania, its starting point in modernity, being the 1990 elections, the first indiscriminative political elections.

Mrs. Georgeta Ionescu, Senior Counsellor at the Romanian Government, has succeeded during her career to be a pioneer in institutions that were until recently dominated by men only, such as the Chamber of Deputies or the Ministry of Defence. Reporting also from her personal experience, she considered that Romanian women succeeded, through their solid management qualities to bring reform in institutions which were renowned for their resistance to reform.

Mrs. Sandra Pralong President and CEO of Synergy Communications and high level consultant to the UNDP in the region, has presented a revealing example of the role of women in society, synthesising their importance in the society as a whole. “The World Bank wanted at some point to build a very expensive bridge in a small village in Asia. Engineers were brought to push the project through and push forward a budget: everybody was amazed and was thrilled to cut the deal. Yet, in a remoted corner, a woman dared to speak up. She had explained that the bridge was designed for cars only, whereas people living there, were bringing water from the other side of the river; either by foot, or with the horses, children had to cross over as well. The bridge, theoretically well designed and projected would therefore be useless; moreover, it would harm the life of the community. The original project of the bridge had no sidewalks and had to be reconsidered.”



**With these refreshing remarks, the conference audience is determined to form a network, either in the form of a Pact, with concrete agenda, a sort of a grass roots movement; animated in cooperation with the Ithaka foundation. We hope to view a draft of this initiative by mid October.**