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The European conference

One of the aims of the European Centre of Gargnano (Lake Garda, Italy) is to promote the knowledge of the constitutive identity of Europe. Equality of women and men is one of the values affirmed by the European Charter and treaties, but the substantial under representation of women in the institutions of representative democracy leaves our democracies "unachieved". Therefore, with a conference of about thirty highly competent women from four European countries, who are involved in institutional politics and relevant associations, we intended analysing what affects women participation in politics and suggesting ways of overcoming it. The result of this conference can be found in the final document reproduced on the other side of this leaflet.

Organisation

- Insertion – Centre Européen de Rencontre et de Ressourcement
- with the collaboration of the Pôle Jean Monnet of the University of Trento
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Toward a democracy based on gender equality

Final document of the European conference

Ethics and politics

The view of women
involved in citizenship



Photo : Corriere della Sera, 27.03.2006

Centre Européen de Rencontre
et de Ressourcement

Gargnano and Trento
10-14 May 2006

f i n a l d o c u m e n t

Context and challenges

From its origins democracy, in spite of its universalism, left women behind, excluding in this way half of its citizens.

While women have gained access to politics as a right, their under representation where democratic decisions are taken is still patent. This gap becomes wider as one climbs the levels of responsibility and it remains substantial even inside political parties.

We consider this problem from both quantitative and qualitative points of view. The positions occupied by women, the length of their mandate, and the tasks assigned to them are unavoidable indicators to analyse equal opportunity in political practice. Although Europe has chosen gender equality as an axiom of its identity in various treaties and directives, there are still many obstacles to be overcome and strategies to be adopted in order to make the participation of women a reality and allow them to serve for the common good.

Hurdles against the participation of women in politics

The absence of a true culture of gender equality is a great impediment toward the participation of women in politics. In two areas in particular there are strong impediments: the private and the political domain.

Private domain

- lack of equal opportunity in economic, professional, and family situations can negatively affect the capacity of involvement
- the fact of having to choose between relationships, family, and profession on one side and political involvement on the other
- the unequal share of family responsibilities

Political domain

- very often political parties adopt strategies to maintain power, instead of becoming involved in projects for the common good
- obscure strategies and collusions which cause malaise among women
- the limited importance given to competency and the lack of training to transform capacity into competency

Proposals and strategies

In this context, four strategic fields have been highlighted to strengthen equal opportunity in political practice: capitalisation of what has been acquired, legislation, action, and communication.

Capitalisation

- to highlight and publicise the ideas of women and their assessments about all political topics
- to make use of the achievements of feminism for the promotion and improvement of female political practice
- to publicize the sites and actions of women who are involved in politics
- to promote a tradition of evaluation of political results within parties
- to publicize demands and political analyses that promote equal opportunity between genders
- to establish a relationship between intellectual research and field practice
- to set up strategies for the transmission of ways and means in political action

Legislation

- to adopt in all countries laws that impose gender equality (quota included)
- to prevent with effective sanctions the defrauding of this legislation

Action

With practical initiatives

- to develop personal help services (e.g. minding of small children, domestic tasks, assisted transport) in order to support female participation
- to bring out within political parties female skills and their own approach
- to strengthen the whole political approach for equal opportunity (mainstreaming) by adopting preferential rules for women (affirmative action)
- to demand the elimination of internal competition, aggressiveness, authoritarianism, and harassment within political parties

With training

- to affirm the right and duty of women of becoming involved in politics by establishing a cultural representation of the reality of their participation
- to promote permanent education in speech delivering, conceptualising and the transmission of achievements
- to improve the capacity of women in conducting a political action in order to appropriate those context where they were excluded
- to strengthen women's skills in achieving operational citizenship
- to develop training programs for communication techniques via internet and other media

With networking

- to integrate the networks of women active in politics with those of women involved with all other community activities.
- to create opportunities for discussion between women and men to elaborate a political culture based on equality

Communication

- to create a new system of information and communication based on the political wisdom and strategies derived from female competency
- to set up and develop new communication tools that highlight women's action through the media
- to participate in the existing information and communication technologies as tools to promote women's political actions

Suggestions for changes in the political culture of men and women

Women signal a need for rules and regulation in politics in the name of an ethical preoccupation that would also facilitate their participation.

The following suggestions are only the first ones of a series of rules in politics that urgently need to be formulated and formalised.

- a limit in the accumulation of mandates
- a limit in the successive number of mandates
- application of transparency in politics
- regular publication of actual realisations