

## Parties need each other when working on gender equality

What does the EU do for women? How can 'Europe' ensure greater gender equality? And what influence can citizens exert on these matters? These are some of the questions which the international debate 'Make Europe Better for Women!' is trying to answer. Chair of the day Tilly Vriend makes sure the afternoon runs smoothly. Participants: a full room in *Atria, institute on gender equality and women's history* in Amsterdam and - via a Livestream connection - five participants in Spain, Belgium, Denmark, Albania and Estonia. 'Without cooperation we can't get anything done.'

'The EU works really well for women and their rights. The very first treaty of 1957 already contained an article on equal reward for men and women.' This is a statement that Willemien Ruygrok, director of 'Adviesbureau Europa' (Consultancy Europe), repeatedly hears. And it is partly true, she admits in her presentation. 'But there is no mention of the hastiness which with the treaty came about and of the amount of resistance the article on equal reward met.' In a short history lesson about EU gender policy, she tones down the optimistic perspective. The introduction of equal reward was mainly motivated by economic reasons: France was afraid not being able to compete with Germany that worked with cheap labor (read women).

### Be strong and negotiate

Money is still the pivot of the European Union. EIGE, the European institute for gender equality, took 3.27 million euros in 2013. In real terms, this means that the EU spends 0.006473 euro per inhabitant on woman rights. EIGE does a good job: it supports institutions working on gender equality at both a national and on a European level, it ensures dates and goods practices, and gives counselling and trainings. But that is not enough, says Willemien Ruygrok. No matter how hard you work on gender mainstreaming and budgeting, no matter how many organizations, politicians, ministers and national committees on women's rights there are, if these parties fail to cooperate, nothing will get done. Civil society organizations, politicians and the institutions need each other. The one cannot achieve anything without the other.



Photograph: Miranda Delis

### Be alert, stay active

Emine Bozkurt agrees. For ten years, she was a member of the European Parliament and took part in the committee on women's rights and gender equality. It was hard work keeping women's rights on the agenda. Interestingly, especially the younger women had to be persuaded of the need to continue the fight for gender equality. 'Although the EU has done a lot for equal rights for women, we still have a long way to go. ... We must let our voices be heard and fight for the preservation of our rights. Because

we are moving backward in some places. In Spain for example, abortion is illegal again. Therefore, be alert, lobby actively, and see what your representatives in Brussels can do.'

One of the 'virtual' participants is also strongly in favor of cooperation. By means of an online connection, Søren Winther Lundby, director of the Danish organization New Europe, stands up for an alliance between academicians, businesses and social organizations, complemented with actors at a local and national and/or international level. He calls it an ABC+ alliance. Such cooperation must lead to a strengthening of civil society organizations. European problems demand a European solution. We must invest considerably to tackle social- and gender inequality issues.

### **Domestic violence**

Renée Römken, director of Atria, reflects on domestic violence against women. An abandoned subway station late at night may look scary, the fact remains that women are most at risk at home. Women are more likely to become victims of violence in their own homes than in a public space. The numbers are as plain as day: a quarter of all women in Europe are confronted with domestic violence. Repressive measures against the perpetrator alone do not solve this problem. Prevention and support for both victim and offender can reduce and prevent domestic violence. Restraining orders, for example, where offenders are temporarily banned from the house, are found to be very effective. Austria started with it, nowadays much more countries in Europe apply this measure. The restraining order is so successful, that it has been incorporated in the Istanbul Convention, a treaty on the combat of (domestic) violence against women. This treaty will become effective this year, because it has now been ratified by sufficient countries (Andorra was country number ten). That is good news, says Renée Römken. This will be the first international treaty regulating the approach to domestic violence in detail. Not only the obligations of the countries and the implementation of the measures, but also the monitoring of measures taken. Especially with the last, the aid of NGO's is badly needed.



Photograph: Miranda Delis

### **Gender and ethnicity**

Marisa Gómez Crespo, director of a platform for over nine thousand NGO's in Spain, shows from Madrid how she tries to introduce gender mainstreaming in the member organizations. She aims for raising the awareness of gender equality in both the culture and activities of the organizations. Gender expert Blerina Guga from Albania tells that in her country the focus is especially on empowerment of women. There has also been a quota of 30% women introduced for political parties, on penalty of a fine. Many parties failed to meet this quota. NGO's exert pressure on the government to stick to the quota. Blerina Guga: On paper the legislation looks good, but in practice, the implementation of gender equality is still insufficient.

Political power is badly divided, states Liza Mügge, university lecturer at the UvA, the University of Amsterdam, in her presentation. If you look at the national parliaments of the EU countries, only 27%

of them are women. The European Parliament has a slightly better female representation, 35% of them are women. Leonie van Gils, President of 'Vrouwenbelangen' (women's interests), has a practical solution for achieving equal m/f-representation in politics. 'Give everyone two votes: one for a woman, one for a man.'

It is not only women who are structurally under-represented in politics, non-Western migrants are even worse off. And there is hardly any attention for them. Liza Mügge pleads for intersectionality: gender and ethnicity should become integrated. That can lead to unexpected images. It turns out that the migrants who are active in politics in Flanders and the Netherlands are nearly all woman. Men from ethnic minorities hardly play a role.

### **Direct contact with MEP**

Elisa Bruno, manager at ECAS (European Citizen Action service) in Brussels, demands attention to two matters. First of all for the 'Women on Board' proposal of the European Commission, this wants to establish a quota of 40% women at the top of companies. This proposal meets a lot of resistance, particularly from the United Kingdom, which states that companies ought to regulate this themselves. The introduction of quota is now halting. Furthermore, there is another development that she finds alarming: the citizens' initiative 'One of US' demands that the EU puts no money available for family planning and abortion in developing countries. Women's organizations, keep a sharp eye on all of this, is her call.

Ülle-Marike Papp of the Estonian Women's Studies and resource Centre (ENUT) also urges (women's) organizations to look at how they can influence European decisions. This can be done in several ways (participate in the consultations of the gender committee, participates in making draft documents, writing reports themselves). But the best of all: keep direct contact with a member of the European Parliament. Feed them with information, arguments, reports and evidence. Mail and call them. Invite them as a speaker on conferences and seminars. That way, as a small NGO, you can have as much influence as a wealthy multinational.

### **New approaches to old problems**

Agnes Jongerius, who is a bit late because she was busy campaigning as a candidate for the European Parliament, is open for this kind of contact. If she is elected for the European Parliament after 22 May, she will put a focus on jobs and to equal treatment of men and women. Therefore she might become involved in the committee for gender equality. The fight for women's rights is near to my heart. Equal treatment is reflected in the history of Atria, and in the history of the labor movement. We will be able to win over the younger women. Let's look at new ways to address old problems.'



Photograph: Miranda Delis

**Still a lot of work to do**

In the various party programs for the European elections nothing is mentioned about women's emancipation, a participant in the debate room intervenes. How can that happen? Is it because there is already so much regulated in legislation? Is our work done? Hedy d Ancona, (former politician) is also angry about that. I don't get that campaigners are able to ignore half of the voters. It is a disgrace. There is still so much to do. Women's trafficking, for example, is a major problem. The only way to tackle this is to cooperate.

Over the past forty years, women have acquired many rights, but we still have a long way to go, Renée Römken joins in. Having equal rights is one thing, implementation is another. We now face the challenge to formulate very accurately what women's rights exactly are. There is still a lot of work to do.

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