

The Gender Gap in Women's Leadership in Cyprus

The Hub: Cypriot Women's Leadership Network
Show Her She Can: Empowering Cypriot Women to Innovate and Participate
AKTI Project and Research

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INTRODUCTION

The Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies is conducting a study within the framework of the project "Show Her She Can: Empowering Cypriot Women to Innovate and Participate", coordinated by AKTI Project and Research (www.akti.org.cy) and funded by the "Global Women, Peace and Security" grant from the U.S. State Department. The overall aim of the project is to empower Cypriot women to become active participants in decision-making at all levels, including in the reinvigorated peace process and in the public, private and civil society sectors more broadly.

This report focuses on gender [in]equality in decision-making and leadership and aims to provide an understanding of the root causes in such inequality in Cyprus, the main barriers to women's leadership, and possible strategies to overcome gender equality and to increase the participation of women in decision-making at all levels.

The study was conducted through desk research and was enhanced with the expert of opinions of the following:

- Maria Hadjipavlou, Associate Professor, University of Cyprus and member of the Gender Advisory Team (GAT)
- Alexia Panayiotou, Assistant Professor, University of Cyprus
- Erato Kozakou Marcoulli, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Former Minister of Communications and Works of the Republic of Cyprus
- Nicos Gregoriou, European Affairs Officer, PEO Trade Union
- Leonidas Paschalides, Director of Education and Development, Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Why Equal Representation of Women and Men?

Women's presence in politics is a standard indicator of the democracy of a society.¹ If more than half of the population is persistently under-represented, the legitimacy and the functioning of the democratic system are put under question. Even if women have the same formal political rights as men, and if some individual women hold high political positions, women as a group are excluded from decision-making positions on the political stage. It is mostly men who set the political priorities, decide on the spending of public money, and the political culture continues to be male dominated.

Parity democracy is not just about numbers, but also about improving the quality of policies and the development of democratic principles and standards. A 30% representation of women is considered as the critical mass needed in order for the women representatives to be able to change the political culture, bring new issues to the agenda, and to act efficiently for women's rights.²

Marcoulli pointed out that, in relation to women's representation in economic decision-making, several European and international studies have demonstrated a correlation between companies' improved commercial and financial performance and the presence of women in their decision-making bodies. She

¹ IDEA and Charter 88: Handbook on Democracy Assessment, Stockholm; IDEA 2002

² 30% threshold was suggested by the UN Commission on the Status of Women

mentioned in particular studies that have demonstrated that if women's productivity level would rise to the level of men's, Europe's GDP could grow by 27%. When women are present and integrated into companies, including at the highest level, companies perform better, are more efficient and turn in better results and profits. Furthermore, the interests of men and women are different and even conflicting at times and therefore women are needed in representative institutions to articulate the interests of women. Finally more than half of the students graduating from Europe's universities and other higher educational institutions are women and these talents should be fully utilized for the benefit of economic growth and advancement of society.

Other studies have shown that having more women in decision-making has a spill over effect in relation to other aspects in particular, retaining highly skilled staff, which is an important aspect for many companies. These studies also point out that the presence of women on boards enhances the level of innovation, reduces the level of conflict and ensures high quality of board development activities.³

THE INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK

At the international level, the equal participation of women and men in decision is seen as a fundamental basis of democracy and social justice and has been strongly promoted. Gender balance in politics is one of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and is referred to in articles 7 and 8 of the legally binding Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The Council of Europe has done some interesting work on women in decision-making and parity democracy. A Recommendation on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making was adopted in 2003.⁴ The recommendation on gender equality standards and mechanisms adopted in November 2007⁵ lists elements which can be used to evaluate whether governments are committed in achieving equal participation of women and men.

At the European Union level, there is no binding provision for the realisation of equality between women and men in political decision-making. However, the EU institutions have adopted non-binding texts relative to gender equality in decision-making.

In November 2012, the European Commission proposed legislation with the aim of attaining a 40% gender balance on non-executive boards in large, publicly listed companies across the EU. This legislation was approved by the European Parliament a year later and is currently under consideration

³ See for example: EVA Analysis (2007), Female Leadership and Firm Profitability, http://www.europeanpwn.net/files/eva_analysis_english.pdf, Catalyst (2011), The Bottom Line: Corporate Performance and Women's Representation on Boards (2004-2008) http://www.catalyst.org/system/files/the_bottom_line_corporate_performance_and_women%27s_representation_on_boards_%282004-2008%29.pdf, Credit Suisse (2012), Gender Diversity and Corporate Performance https://www.credit-suisse.com/newsletter/doc/gender_diversity.pdf, McKinsey (2012), Women Matter 2012: Making the Breakthrough www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/dotcom/client_service/Organization/PDFs/Women_matter_mar2012_english.ashx

⁴ REC (2003) 3

⁵ CM/Rec (2007) 17

by the Council of the European Union. In December 2014, the Council declared itself 'closer to an agreement' and thus closer to approving the Directive.

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN CYPRUS

Women's Leadership in Numbers

Cyprus is among the three countries in the European Union that have the lowest representation of women in politics (EU justice 2014, House of Representative 2015). Specifically, Cyprus ranks as 74th in relation to representation of women in the Council of Ministers and in 107th in relation to women's representation in parliament. Despite some positive developments in women's participation in politics in the early 2000s, progress has been slow and women continue to be severely underrepresented in decision-making processes at all levels. In fact, since 2006 there has been a dramatic backward trend both in political appointments of women as well as in women's political participation both as candidates as well as among those elected:

- Since 1995 until today, we have seen 0% improvement in the representation of women in the Cabinet of Ministers. In addition, whereas in 2011 there were 3 women ministers (out of an 11 member cabinet), today there is only one woman Minister.
- There are only three female Permanent Secretaries (out of 11), the highest ranking post in the civil service. Out of 51 Departments/Services of Ministries, seven are headed by a woman.
- In the Cyprus Parliament, whereas in 2006 there was a slight increase in women's representation from 10.7% to 14.3%, following the parliamentary elections in 2011 this percentage dropped to 10.7%. The representation of women on the parity candidate lists did not exceed 24.5%.
- Following the municipal elections in 2011, the participation of women in municipal councils fell from 20.3% to 17.9%.
- Following the Cyprus European Parliament election of 2014, the participation of women in the European Parliament fell from 33% to 16%. The participation of women on the candidate lists was 23%.

In economic life, women are significantly under-represented in managerial jobs and top posts. Cyprus has one of the lowest rates of female managers and women in decision-making positions. Specifically, in the case of large Cypriot companies, only 4% of members of boards in largest quoted companies, supervisory board or board of directors are women.⁶ In the public sector, women's representation in the highest levels of the civil services is also significantly low compared with the share of men (less than 2 out of 15 managers / administrative officers are women).⁷

According to Hadjipavlou, it is a paradox that women are so underrepresented on the local level – particularly on the level of members of municipal councils. She stresses that this is an indication of a failure on behalf of political parties to reach out to women both as candidates as well as voters.

⁶ EIGE (2013b), Gender Equality Index for Cyprus [Internet], European Institute for Gender Equality, <http://eige.europa.eu/content/gender-equalityindex#/country/CY>

⁷ Cyprus Statistical Services, The Statistical Portrait of Women in Cyprus, 2012

According to Panayiotou, one cannot talk of trends when the numbers are so small. Incremental increases or decreases in the rates of female participation in decision-making cannot be defined as an upward or downward trend because the difference in real numbers is so small. Rather than trying to interpret trends, Panayiotou believes that we need to focus on why numbers are not moving in the first place.

Panayiotou sees it as an issue of 'supply' and 'demand'. On the one hand, there is a backlash in relation to gender equality in Cyprus with society in general averse to voting for women or promoting women 'because they are women'. On the other hand there is a 'supply' issue with women not coming forward either to claim positions in company boards or to put themselves forward as candidates for election for a variety of reasons further discussed below.

Gregoriou agreed with this analysis, adding that the root of the problem is that women are still not treated equally by contemporary society in general. There is still the general belief and attitude that women are secondary to men. The fact that women are underrepresented in decision-making is only a symptom of the general problem of unequal treatment. This is an issue that affects all of society – both women and men – and what is needed are structures and institutions that have at their foundations a culture of equal opportunity and equal access for all citizens regardless of gender.

Interestingly, however, according to a Eurobarometer Special Survey carried out by the European Commission, Cypriot citizens claim to support equality between women and men in decision-making. According to the survey, 96% of people in Cyprus (and 88% of Europeans) think that, given equal competences, women should be equally represented in positions of leadership in companies and 91% (and 75% of Europeans) are in favour of legislation on this matter under the condition that qualification is taken into account without automatically favouring one or other gender.⁸ This survey indicates that, in fact, people in Cyprus understand that there is an issue of inequality in decision-making and leadership positions in Cyprus, and expect the state to take action to address the issue.

Women and the Cyprus Peace Process

The absence of women in key decision-making bodies hinders the inclusion of a gender perspective in these critical spheres of influence. This is especially true with the regard to the negotiations and resolution of the Cyprus conflict, where the presence of women is non-existent. The Cyprus conflict is overwhelmingly a male 'creation' and a male-defined problem. To this day there has not been any official discussion neither in the parliament nor at the executive levels on the implementation of UN Security Council 1325 which Cyprus signed.

Despite having ratified UNSCR 1325, Cyprus does not yet have a National Action Plan (NAP) for its implementation and because of the division of the island and the different statuses of the two parts; it would not be possible at this stage to have a NAP for the entire island. Gender has also not been part of the political and/or peace discourse as this has been dominated by purely ethnic concerns.

⁸ Special Eurobarometer 376 Women in decision-making positions.
http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_376_fact_cy_en.pdf

More recent efforts have been by the Gender Advisory Team (GAT), formed in October 2009 and comprised of women activists from the non-governmental sector as well as academia who continue to try and bridge this gap and ensure that gender equality is integrated into the peace negotiations in Cyprus as well as in all the peace-building processes post-conflict. GAT is striving to mainstream gender equality in the peace process, by ensuring women's active participation in all phases of the process and gender-proofing the content and basis of future peace agreements. It acknowledges the existing differences amongst the different Cypriot communities which should be noted in all relevant documents. However, to date these efforts have received minimal real backing or support from the Cyprus Government.

In their research, GAT identified a number of features that have contributed perhaps toward failure in the peace negotiations, namely:

- Cypriot women have never sat at the negotiating table;
- The context of the negotiations lacks a gender perspective and the interpretation of 'equality' has tended to focus exclusively on ethnic differences;
- There is very limited action by the women's organizations to address negotiators as decision-makers obligated to ensure gender equality; and
- Despite the attention to 'human rights' by negotiators, gender-based rights and the related social rights have fallen outside the scope of concern.

According to Marcoulli, the lack of women's participation over the years on the negotiating table has impeded both sides from utilizing women's talents and perspectives that could be very useful and indeed instrumental in the discussions on all core issues of the negotiations. The very exceptional and few occasions that women actually participated in the negotiations do not allow any serious evaluation of their impact in the overall peace process.

According to Hadjipavlou, in countries where women have sat at the negotiating table the outcome was faster and more effective. A lot of research still needs to be done in this area, to look at the impact of women's participation in peace making processes in other conflict societies. Their presence has an impact on the kind of peace that will be achieved, and what kind of country because women have a different understanding of issues such as security, property, and governance. Gender equality needs to be integrated into the very foundation of any new peace deal; it is not something that can come later.

When the negotiations were ongoing there was more movement within civil society. Unfortunately, now that the negotiations are at a standstill, the work of civil society such as GAT becomes more difficult. As Hadjipavlou pointed out, "When there is more movement at the macro level, there is more movement on the micro level as well". We need to move away from the more legalistic framework and begin integrating other voices, including women's in the peace-making processes. There is no single women's organization (associated to political parties) that has raised the issue of women's representation in the peace-making process and lobby for the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions such as UNSCR 1325. Movement is still at a low level, and is generated by small groups of women. According to Hadjipavlou, "we need movement and coalition building among women's rights activists. It is not too late to build a women's movement."

Existing Provisions and measures for the promotion of women's leadership in Cyprus

Despite Cyprus's legislative framework on equality between women and men, the fulfilment of women's rights requires more than the removal of formal barriers and there remain political, socio-economic, and cultural barriers to the advancement of women in Cyprus.

Cyprus does not have a long history of gender equality and there is no broad political agreement on gender equality policy. There is a lack of gender balance in almost all walks of life and thus masculine models throughout decision-making in all social and political structures and processes including government and political parties, parliament, judiciary, economy, and mass media as well as weak implementation and monitoring mechanisms.

There has been very limited action by successive Cyprus Governments to encourage women's involvement in political and public life and, according to a mid-term evaluation on the implementation of the National Action Plan on Equality between Women and Men (2007-2013), the issue has received the least political and financial support. Activities of the National Machinery of Women's Rights of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order are limited to sporadic seminars and press conferences, with poor attendance and no media visibility, rather than systematic action involving all relevant stakeholders with specific targets. In fact, since the parliamentary elections of 2006, the issue has all but disappeared from the political agenda irrespective of which political party/ies are in power.

As Hadjipavlou points out, the current situation in relation to women's representation shows that although the Cyprus' legislative framework on gender equality is relatively good, there is a very big gap in its application. Cyprus is lacking those institutional structures and research centres that deal with these issues and that continually produce more data and information that can feed into policy formulation and implementation. Even on the level of education and research, only recently has the UCY introduced gender studies as a subject of study.

Cyprus has been extremely reluctant to implement positive action measures such as quotas, even on a temporary basis as foreseen by the CEDAW Convention to accelerate de facto equality between women and men. The National Action Plan on Gender Equality (2007-2013), in its chapter on the "Balanced Participation of Women and Men in Political/Social and Economic Life", foresaw measures for the introduction of targets and quotas, such as the target of 40% for the participation of women in political life, quota of 30% for women in ballots in local, parliamentary and euro-parliamentary elections, and a quota of 30% for women in the appointments in all public committees and boards. Since the NAP's adoption in 2007 no initiative has been undertaken by the Government, nor has there been any public dialogue on the issue of quotas or other positive action measures to support the candidacy of women who are running for political and public office.

The Cyprus Government recently adopted a new National Action Plan on Equality between Men and Women (2014-2017) that foresees concrete measures to promote the representation of women in public and political life including activities to support women candidates in political life (including political appointments and elected offices), and activities to promote equal exposure of women and men political candidates including through awareness campaigns and through the media. It is promising that the NAP includes specific timelines and budgets for the implementation of the activities foreseen.

However, as the NAP is still in the very early stages of its implementation, it is not possible to assess the impact of its implementation.

In economic life, according to Paschalides, businesses have not adopted any voluntary measures or policies to promote women's advancement into executive positions or on company boards. There is a general lack of awareness on the benefits of promoting women's representation and there continues to exist both direct and indirect discrimination against women.

FACTORS IMPEDING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

Historical Factors

The issues faced by women who wish to participate in political and public life are broad and multifaceted. Such factors are systemic and structural and others are personal, but importantly most factors overlap and feed into each other. According to Hadjipavlou, in order to really understand women's position in Cypriot society today, it is important to look at those historical reasons/conditions and how Cyprus developed historically.

Before Cyprus's independence, the position of women was limited to the private sphere and only those women that were more socially and economically privileged had access to education. So class was an important factor in defining women's access to education and therefore employment. However, women's participation in the labour market was limited to education and nursing – stereotypically defined as women's sectors – and women were often forced to give up their careers as soon as they got married. Thus, very early on in Cyprus women did not have a permanent presence in the public sector and women's activity in public life was limited to philanthropy as this was seen as compatible with their role as 'carers' and 'mothers'.

As a result, the answers to the very important question at a very crucial moment of Cyprus's history of "what kind of Cyprus do we want to live in?" came from men and women only played a supplementary and secondary role in these discussions. As Hadjipavlou points out "The thinking, the organizing and the doing came from men and so there was no programme for social change prior to Cyprus's independence."

"The dominance of the Cyprus problem that has been defined from a male understanding and has excluded a lot of other parameters that this conflict generated or entails. It has always been defined in an adversarial way as in T/C vis-à-vis G/C - and did not look at issues that had nothing to do with people's everyday lives. We had a culture that was adversarial so the absence of women from the very beginning to bring another understanding played in my view a very big role. We did not have a woman in parliament until 1982."

- Maria Hadjipavlou

Political Parties as Gatekeepers

As documented in this report, the level of women's representation in decision-making is determined by a wide range of factors both structural and personal. However, within these complex set of factors,

“political parties are increasingly referred to as the “gatekeepers” of democracy – and of women’s political participation in particular”.⁹

Political parties play a fundamental role in democratic processes in that they represent the views and perspectives of citizens, and channel these perspectives into appropriate political fora and policy making processes. More importantly for the purposes of this report however, is that political parties are the mechanisms through which women and men emerge as elected representatives, and, in the case of Cyprus, as political appointees in various sectors of economic and political life.

In Cyprus, efforts by the political parties to increase the number of women involved in politics have been superficial and have offered no real qualitative influence or decision-making powers. Political parties generally do not promote women as candidates for election in representative bodies or for propose women as candidates for appointment to top decision-making positions. In fact, as one interviewee pointed out, women in many countries are often used by political parties to lobby for male candidates and organizational activities, rather than for their own election to representative positions.

According to our experts, the structure and the organization of male-dominated political parties effectively exclude women from political party processes at all levels. It is often said by political party representatives that the main reason that there are so few women within political party ranks and, as a result, on electoral lists is that women do not put themselves forward for political office and who a lack of interest in pursuing a career in politics. However, how political parties function and how their functions are regulated can have a significant impact on opportunities for women’s political advancement.¹⁰ According to a report by the OSCE, “A lack of internal party democracy and transparency, the absence of gender-sensitivity in candidate selection and outreach, as well as the failure to decentralize party decision-making processes, all inhibit women’s opportunities to advance as leaders within parties and as candidates for elected office.”¹¹

As pointed out by Hadjipavlou:

“Feminism tells that power is a resource in abundance – that every individual and every citizen has power. Patriarchy hierarchizes power and tells us that those at the top have more power than those at the bottom. Feminism says that those at the bottom have equal power than those at the top...and it is dialectic; one cannot exist without the other. So without redefining politics and the concept of power we will not be able to redefine women and men’s contribution to society”.

There also seems to be a lack of understanding of the benefits of promoting women in political party ranks. Evidence suggests that engaging more women in politics provides tangible benefits for political parties. As a recent report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) found, women can “deliver the margin of victory for successful parties and candidates” due to the fact that women are the majority of voters in every country and are more likely

⁹ OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Handbook on Promoting Women’s Participation in Political Parties <http://www.osce.org/odihr/120877?download=true>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

to turn out to vote.¹² Thus, it is in political parties' interest to engage women voters. Furthermore, equal representation brings a renewal of people within political parties, including women, young people, people from under-represented groups, widening the perspectives and bringing new competences in order for them to be more representative of the citizens they are meant to represent.¹³ Finally, research has indicated that the presence of more women in legislatures is positively correlated with increased perceptions of government legitimacy among both women and men.¹⁴

All political parties have women's wings or sections which have been one avenue, historically, for women to organize in the absence of an independent women's movement. Their role was important in bringing some equality issues on the table – particularly on labour issues – but were not been effective in pressuring the party to enact reforms and increase the participation of women in high-level party affairs or in ensuring a gender equality perspective in policy development. According to Hadjipavlou, unfortunately women did not project their right to be represented within the political parties that they belonged to. Marcoulli went even further to say that “the fact that most political parties have women's organizations which are controlled by the male hierarchy of the party, has impeded women active in political parties to exercise the necessary pressure”.

So although these political structures provided women with opportunities to become active in public life and promote issues of gender equality, in reality women's sections have in practice side-lined women's rights issues and have limited the scope of the women's movement more generally. As will be discussed further below, there was no independent feminist movement that would have promoted an alternative and also for these women to rethink their agendas. So it stayed within the parameters of the male political party system.

Gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles

Traditions based on patriarchal socio-cultural stereotypes, continue to be deeply rooted in Cypriot society. Women are still socialized to fulfil socially constructed roles of 'mothers' and carers despite constituting 60% of university graduates. According to Hadjipavlou, young women still find it hard to imagine their future outside of the framework of these socially constructed roles. Women and men internalize traditional gender stereotypes and roles and such stereotypes are reinforced and perpetuated by institutions such as the education system, the family, and the media.

According to Panayiotou, negative stereotypes do not only affect the 'demand' for women's leadership but also affects the 'supply' in that women themselves internalize negative gender stereotypes which in turn affects their sense of value and self-worth, as well as their confidence in their own skills and knowledge. In other words, the presence of these negative stereotypes threatens both women's self-concept as well as their performance.

¹² Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties. A Good Practices Guide to Promote Women's Political Participation, UNDP/NDI, 2011, p.25, <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/womens-empowerment/em-power-women-political-parties.html>

¹³ EWL Parity Democracy Lobbying Kit

¹⁴ Leslie A. Schwindt-Bayer and William Mishler, “An Integrated Model of Women's Representation”, Journal of Politics, Vol. 67, No. 2, 2005, pp. 407–428

All the experts agreed that women and men, girls and boys are segregated from very young age and this is reflected in all areas of society, including on the level of leadership. This is something that needs to be addressed from the very young ages by promoting activities that will include and engage both girls and boys, but also in the older ages in school activities, student committees and councils. Experts pointed out that girls and boys need to start interacting very early on in order to start building a culture where representation is redefined according to both genders' value.

All interviewees agreed that men and women continue to be assigned different levels of freedom and different levels of privilege, status and value by society and this impacts women's access to leadership positions. In Cyprus, women still carry a disproportionate share of domestic and care work, and this is often put forward as the main reasons women choose not to run for office or take on increased responsibility. The working schedules in most elected parliaments as well as company boards are a proof of the assumption that those who participate in decision-making do not have family responsibilities, which is an obvious disadvantage for women. According to Paschalides, this is a form of indirect discrimination and there is an urgent need to raise awareness among companies on the benefits of being gender inclusive.

Increasing women's representation in decision-making is linked to promoting better policies and support systems for the reconciliation of work and private life for both women and men. The current low rate of female representation on company boards can only be understood within the broader context of unequal access to economic, social and cultural resources between men and women, inequalities regarding paid and unpaid work, and an entire system of work and employment which does not allow for fair and effective reconciliation of work and family life by both women and men. Equally, if not more, important is to create a culture where both men and women share household and family responsibilities. According to Hadjipavlou "unless this becomes a men's and women's issue it will always be a 'women's issue' and marginalized in political decision-making."

Policies for the reconciliation of work and family life such as child care provision, paid parental leave, and flexible work arrangements are lacking in Cyprus. All interviewees agreed that the state holds responsibility for not creating a care infrastructure that would allow women careers that go beyond providing a supplementary income to the household. Informal child care arrangements continue to prevail in Cyprus, with the extended family (mostly grandmothers) playing the primary role in the provision of care. Care by domestic workers, although not formally recognized as child care by the state, has become increasingly popular in the last two decades. Indeed, the services of female migrant domestic workers have played an instrumental role in 'liberating' Cypriot women with children and other dependents to enter, re-enter, or remain in the workplace. Thus, the lack of effective measures for to support working families has not only put women at a disadvantage both in the labour market as well as in decision-making centres, but has also served to reinforce and perpetuate traditional gender roles within the household.

The Impact of the Economic Crisis

Although the impact of the recession in Cyprus came somewhat delayed as compared to other EU member states, its effects have been tangible in terms of a dramatic increase in unemployment and a

reduction in wages which in turn have affected risk of poverty rates and social exclusion for both women and men. However, the effects have been most dramatic on members of vulnerable groups, who already faced multiple disadvantages. This is evident in labour market indicators that show that, despite decline employment rates among both women and men, women continue to be the worst affected by long-term unemployment as well as precarious working conditions (part-time work and short-term contracts). According to Gregoriou, in conditions of economic crisis and austerity, the most vulnerable groups, including women, are more likely to become victims of discrimination and exclusion. In these conditions, women are less likely to build networks, focus on career and spend time promoting themselves.¹⁵ Paschalides agreed with this view and pointed out that it is not a question of ability, skills or confidence that is impeding women's advancement but a question of lack of time and a supporting infrastructure. The deteriorating economic conditions in Cyprus have also affected women access to economic resources and financial support for political campaigning.

Furthermore, it is important to mention that the crisis has had a detrimental effect on gender equality programmes and funding for women's NGOs in Cyprus. This has limited both their scope for action, particularly in supporting vulnerable women such as the elderly, single parents, victims of violence, etc., but also limits women's participation in discussions regarding the economic crisis and responses to it.

Unfortunately, gender equality is largely framed as part of the problem rather than part of the solution to the economic crisis, both in Cyprus and in Europe. While the current economic crisis has magnified Europe's need to rely on knowledge, competence and innovation and to make full use of the pool of available talent¹⁶, this has not translated into effective policies to increase women's participation in decision-making at all levels.

The Role of Civil Society and the Women's Movement

In the absence of political will among political leadership to promote gender parity in political decision-making, civil society can play a key role in mobilizing on a grass-roots level and forming alliances to effectively advocate for more democratic political processes. Civil society organizations can also play an important role in supporting women in advancing their political careers, assisting political parties to promote women and gender equality and raising awareness among both the electorate and political stakeholders about women's political capacities and contributions.¹⁷ Despite this, in Cyprus the capacity of civil society to mobilize and advocate effectively for policy change on gender equality issues remains weak and uncoordinated.

Historically speaking, this is partly due to the Cyprus problem of ethnic conflict dominating the national agenda and creating an environment not conducive to human rights activism. As Hadjipavlou pointed out, during the 60s and 70s which were very important in terms of women's movements internationally, "Cyprus was a microcosm of nationalism and of adversarial politics". Panayiotou agrees with this stating

¹⁵ Equality and Human Rights Commission, Sex and Power Survey 2011
http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/documents/sex+power/sex_and_power_2011_gb_2_.pdf

¹⁶ COM 614 final, 2012 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2012:0614:FIN:en:PDF>

¹⁷ OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Handbook on Promoting Women's Participation in Political Parties <http://www.osce.org/odihr/120877?download=true>

that in countries such as the U.S., there were different kinds of historical movements and through these movements different levels of consciousness were raised through public and academic debates. In Cyprus, no similar historical movements or public and academic debates existed. This has resulted in Cyprus adopting a public discourse on women's rights, for example, without going through the different levels of consciousness that other countries in Europe and North America have.

More recently, however, civil society is growing and more human rights NGOs are taking an active part in public debates and advocating for a range of human rights issues. Many women's organisations also work with parliament, including key committees and parliamentarians on gender equality issues. This not only helps to establish the legislative basis for gender equality in society but also increases the substantive influence of women in the Cyprus Parliament.

Despite this, although there is a general consensus among civil society organisations working on gender equality and women's rights that concrete action is needed for the achievement of gender parity in decision-making, resources, coordination and a long-term strategy are lacking. Thus, there has been a relative weakness of civil society to mobilize effectively and build coalitions for gender parity in political decision-making and processes. Albeit the limited resources at the disposal of women's organisations in Cyprus, there have been promising initiatives generated by civil society organisations for the promotion of women in decision-making in recent years that have promoted increased public dialogue on the issue and generated public awareness for the need for gender equality in decision-making at all levels.

As Marcoulli points out:

"I would also dare to say that in Cyprus we also lack the necessary pressure groups in the form of active women's movements that would pose a threat to the male dominated system in order to induce the need for changes. What is needed and is still lacking is an umbrella organization with no political affiliations that would have as its main objective to exercise pressure on the government and the political parties to make the necessary changes that would allow an equal representation of women in public life."

The Role of the Media

Gender stereotypes and traditional attitudes have been recognized as one of the main obstacles to achieving de facto equality between women and men in Cyprus. Research has shown that the media have a tremendous impact on how the public views and assesses women and their political capacities.¹⁸

Research conducted by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) both in 2009 and 2014 during the pre-election period of the European Parliament elections, has shown a serious underrepresentation of women political candidates in mainstream media.¹⁹ During the pre-election period in 2009, only 17.3% of candidates who were represented in the two main newspapers that were

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) (2009), Αναπαράσταση των Γυναικών Υποψηφίων στις Εφημερίδες στα Πλαίσια της Προεκλογικής Περιόδου – Ευρωεκλογές 2009 http://www.medinstgenderstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/Gender-Media-Report_EP-Elections_Final.pdf and Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) (2014), Αποκλεισμός Γυναικών Υποψηφίων Ευρωβουλευτών από τα Μέσα Μαζικής Ενημέρωσης <http://paritydemocracy.eu/%CE%BC%CE%BC%CE%B5/>

studied were women. In 2014 only 20% of candidates in newspapers and on TV shows dedicated to the EU elections were women, despite the fact that the percentage of women candidates was higher (23%). The absence of women candidates in the media can be interpreted as a silencing of women's voices which is a serious form of oppression.²⁰ Also, the absence of women from the media decreases their chances to get elected²¹ thus maintaining the patriarchal structure of decision making in Cyprus and in Europe.

In 2014, MIGS organized a series of consultations with stakeholders, including media and party representatives, in the framework of the "Parity Democracy for Europe" project²² that was coordinated by the Institute. The consultations aimed to facilitate the promotion of women in political decision-making. When the issue of women candidates being invisible in the media was brought up, party representatives placed the blame on the journalists saying that they "specifically ask for male candidates to be interviewed". While asking journalists why women candidates were disproportionally visible in the media, journalists blamed the parties for promoting the representation of male candidates. The unwillingness of both party representatives and media professionals to challenge patriarchy in politics was seemingly indicated by two things: the fact that neither party representatives nor journalists took responsibility for the gender imbalance in the media and in politics plus the fact that the majority of them did not recognize that they played a key role in promoting gender balance in politics and had the ability to take positive measures.

In many cases, both in 2009 and 2014, the media gave essentialist and stereotypical portrayals of women and men candidates. Firstly, women were disproportionally identified in the media by their family status. There was a systematic focus on motherhood which was portrayed as an obstacle to the political career of women candidates. In addition to the focus on motherhood, women candidates received negative comments about both their qualifications and personalities in the media. Furthermore, while portraying women MEP candidates both in 2009 and 2014, there was a focus on appearance and clothes. Finally, patriarchy in politics was also reinforced by the lack of a critical approach in the media. Gender equality in politics was never discussed in the 27 TV shows that were studied. Only four articles out of the 300 articles that were studied address this issue.

According to one expert, the media can also play an important role by promoting more women's participation in important political and economic debates about crucial issues facing society in general and giving the opportunity to women's organizations to present their agenda and goals.

Based on the most recent survey carried out by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (2010) for the Global Media Monitoring Project 2010, women are severely underrepresented in the news media. Although women have an overall presence as news subjects, reporters and presenters, this

²⁰ Fraser, Nancy (1991) "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy", pp. 109–42 in Craig Calhoun (ed.) *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

²¹ Goldenberg, E. N., Traugott, M. W. (1987). "Mass Media Effects on Recognizing and Rating Candidates in U.S. Senate Elections". In J. Vermeer (Ed.), *Campaigns in the News: Mass Media and Congressional Elections* (pp. 109–133). New York: Greenwood Press.

²² www.paritydemocracy.eu

presence only reaches 15% as compared to 85% men. This vast gender gap clearly demonstrates women's near invisibility in the media in Cyprus.

According to Panayiotou, the role of alternative media including social media is becoming extremely important. Mass media is becoming more democratized and is offering alternative channels for the dissemination of information and social media outlets are increasingly becoming an alternative to traditional media. This 'revolution', as she calls it, is giving a forum to civil society organisations and well as individuals to organize and make their voices heard. According to Panayiotou, this access to information is also access to power.

Positive Action Measures

Women represent a mere 20.4% of national parliaments across the globe. Given this under-representation, there are increasing calls for the adoption of more effective methods to address the issue. Quotas are one such mechanism, and have been introduced in more than 100 countries worldwide. Until recently, Europe was not in the front line of this new global trend. However, in the last ten years, EU countries have increasingly adopted some form of quota system and other positive action measures in order to increase the pace for achieving equality between women and men in political decision-making.

The introduction of gender quotas that have led to fast and significant increases in women's participation in many countries, like Belgium, France, Greece, Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain that have introduced legislative quotas or the majority of the EU member states that have introduced since many years back voluntary party quotas ranging from 30-50% of women candidates in party lists.²³

It is important to mention, however, that the adoption of legislative quotas is not the only way to achieve equality in national parliaments. Denmark, Sweden, Finland and the Netherlands have achieved high levels of female representation in parliaments (37 %, 47 %, 40 % and 41 % respectively), without the use of legislative quotas. Although this process took a long time, their successes were mainly the result of effective gender equality policies on a national level, a strong welfare state and increasing pressure from women's rights movements.

Most political parties in Cyprus have introduced the quota system to favour the participation of women in their decision-making bodies. Some of them also have quotas for their candidate lists. However, this has been made possible through the parties' memorandum/constitution and not through legislation. In addition, under the National Action Plan on Gender Equality and in particular under its chapter on the "Balanced Participation of Women and Men in Political/Social and Economic life", measures for the introduction of targets and quotas have been included, such as the target of 40% for the participation of women in political life, the introduction of a quota of 30% for women in ballots in municipal, parliamentary and euro-parliamentary elections, and a quota of 30% for women in the appointments in all public committees and boards. Despite these targets, there has never been any initiation of public

²³ Working Paper: "The quota-instrument: different approaches across Europe" European Commission's Network to Promote Women in Decision-making in Politics and the Economy, 2011

debate on the issue, or of research to determine the suitability of quotas in the Cyprus context and the level of support among political parties, women's organizations, the media, and the general public. It is the opinion of the authors of this report that, in fact, only a minority of organizations hold a critical view of positive action measures.²⁴

The majority of experts that took part in this study support the adoption of some form of quota system – at least for a temporary period – to promote the participation of women in both political and economic life. However, as pointed out by Gregoriou, although such measures may increase the political presence of women *quantitatively*, further measures are needed to ensure that women have an equal voice with their male colleagues both within political parties as well as among citizens. Most experts agreed that such measures should include reforming the patriarchal internal mechanisms of political parties as well as elected institutions, which presupposes achieving a critical mass of female representation of at least 30%.

Panayiotou on the other hand, believes that political parties are part of the problem and does not see them as part of the solution. She believes that globally we are moving away from the 'party era' and that the future lies in other forms of organized groups such as civil society organisations and in this way different synergies of power will arise which will provide more opportunities for women to lead.

As mentioned above, the European Commission proposed legislation with the aim of attaining a 40% gender balance on non-executive boards in large, publicly listed companies across the EU. According to a report by the European Women's Lobby²⁵, while progress across the 11 countries studied, there has been a certain overall amount of progress within the EU-28 and in Europe in general. Whereas in 2012, women made up only 14% of board members within the EU-28, this has now increased to 19%. Nevertheless, real progress is concentrated in just a few countries – and overwhelmingly those which have introduced legislative measures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Gender stereotypes remain dominant at all levels of social life and impede the involvement of women in politics. Dominant patriarchal attitudes connect women with the home and men in public life.

Cyprus Government:

- The Government should reconsider the establishment of *a unified governmental body on gender equality*, with the allocation of adequate human and financial resources. Such a body should have executive powers and a clear mandate for the promotion of women's rights and gender equality policy in Cyprus.
- The adoption of a *national strategy for the promotion of equal representation of women and men in decision-making* with the participation of all relevant stakeholders including NGOs and

²⁴ For example, among the 8 members of the Cyprus Women's Lobby there is a consensus on the need for legislative quotas in Cyprus.

²⁵ European Women's Lobby (2015), Women on Boards in Europe: Second Progress Report, Cracks in the Glass Ceiling or just a Trick of the Light?

http://issuu.com/europeanwomenslobby3/docs/ewl_cracks_in_the_glass_ceiling_or_/1

women's organisations, youth organisations, political parties, and the media. All measures require regular monitoring and intermediary targets.

- *Gender equality education* needs to be mainstreamed at all levels of education in order to promote a culture of equality and diversity among young people. To this end, systematic training education professionals for the elimination of gender stereotypes should be introduced.
- *Systematic awareness campaigns* targeting the public on the importance of the participation of women in politics and in decision and policy making systems, and to encourage public dialogue and debate on the issue.
- The development of *comprehensive policies for the support working families* that will include strengthening the care infrastructure for children and the elderly.
- The setting up of an *observatory for the systematic collection of data*, monitoring of progress, and publication and dissemination of information on issues related to women's access to decision making bodies and positions.
- The introduction of *positive action measures* including quotas and comprehensive *empowerment and training programmes* for women seeking to enter political and public life;
- Fully implement UNSCR 1325 through the adoption of a *national action plan* in consultation and cooperation with all relevant stakeholders and particularly women's organisations and NGOs.
- Provide *full political backing and support* to the work and efforts of civil society groups such as the Gender Advisory Group (GAT).
- Encourage and provide support, including financial support, for *peace-building efforts of civil society*, and particularly women's organisations.

Political Parties:

- Introduce *democratic and gender-sensitive procedures* into the process of recruiting and selecting their candidates, including specific measures to increase the number of women elected.
- Ensure *equal access to and distribution of party resources* among women and men, particularly during pre-election campaign processes.
- Adopt at the highest executive party level an *operational plan* for gradually increasing the number of women in all bodies of the party and in key party roles, in a way that reflects the share of women in party membership.
- Introducing political party codes of conduct and mainstream a gender perspective into these codes of conduct that clearly outline norms of behaviour in line with gender equality standards.
- *Integrate a gender equality perspective in the political programme* of the party and develop concrete party platform positions on gender equality-related issues.

Media:

- Women and men should be equally represented in the media both qualitatively and quantitatively. To this end, *systematic training of media professionals* in gender equality issues should be introduced and a *databank of women experts/professionals* covering all fields should be developed.

Women's Organisations and NGOs

- Institutional development and empowerment of organized groups to enable them to exert pressure for the effective promotion of equality in political decision-making centers.
- Mobilization and cooperation among civil society actors and women's organisations in order to coordinate action more effectively and act as an effective pressure group for the promotion of gender equality in decision-making.
- Engage in evidence-based research on women in decision-making that can feed into policy formulation and implementation.

Businesses and Companies:

- Companies should develop and implement *gender diversity policies* and streamline all HR policies to this end. These policies should also be communicated effectively throughout middle and senior management.
- Companies can actively promoting women's leadership through *mentoring programmes*, creating a *positive return-to-work environment* following maternity leave and discouraging working practices and hours that impede women's full participation.

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