

"Women's Rights and Political Reform in the EMP"
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Women have rights as human beings, and as gender specific beings. In other words, they have a right to **equality**, but they also have rights based on **difference**.

The promotion of human rights is a central element of the Barcelona Declaration. But what about women's rights in particular? How is it tackled in the Barcelona declaration and in the Euro-Mediterranean process as a whole? Is it meeting the challenge of achieving gender equality and the recognition of rights based on difference?

The Barcelona Declaration does not address specifically the promotion of women's rights. It contains merely three references to women's rights. Within the framework of the second basket, the signatories simply "recognise the key role of women in development" and pledge "to promote their active participation in economic and social life and in the creation of employment."

As regards the third basket, they call on all southern partners to pay particular attention to the role of women in the regular dialogue with the EU on educational policies. The third basket also notes that the EMP must contribute to an improvement of the living and working conditions and greater levels of employment, "in particular of women and the neediest strata of the population."

However, there are no references to the legal and political rights of women, to specific issues that affect women, such as gender violence, and greater access to employment and participation in political decision-making. Since the Declaration is not legally binding it has been very difficult to organize initiatives and work toward the practical implementation of measures to address even these goals, which are considered to be vague and superficial.

An analysis of the association agreements in force with all countries shows that all the accords have normative statements about the role of women in economic and social development. Only the agreements with Egypt and Jordan explicitly refer to the need for women to gain increased access to higher education and training, and only the Lebanese agreement (Article 65-2) refers to equal treatment of the sexes. The reasons for this difference are unclear.

The European Parliament (EP) called for a profound reform of the human rights and democracy clause in a Resolution of February 2005 (the Agnoletto Report). It argued for a newly drafted "model clause" to be included in all agreements, which takes principles like the EU duty to implement gender equality polices into account; it stated that it would not accept new agreements without a clause, and called for enforcement through a "warning mechanism" and the option of temporarily suspending agreements, and an enhanced EP monitoring role.

The first regional programme to promote the role of women in economic life was adopted at the November 2001 Euro-Mediterranean ministerial meeting, but it came into effect only in 2004, which makes it early for an objective evaluation.

Although there are funds allocated within the framework of MEDA I and II and of the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) to women's questions, these funds remain modest and focused solely on social and economic issues.

Also important in this context are the Anna Lindh-Foundation based in Alexandria, the first common institution jointly established and financed by all 35 members of the Partnership, addresses the issue of the empowerment of women as well.

10 years after the beginning of the Barcelona Process, how the position of women is perceived in the EuroMed countries. The ENP adopted in mid-2003, claims to offer Southern Mediterranean partners "everything-but-membership" in exchange for successful reforms in all the areas listed in the bilateral Action Plans, Although all the Plans refer to human rights (and thereby implicitly to women's rights), only those concluded with Jordan, Palestine, Morocco and Tunisia refer to the issue, and then in only very broad terms. Thus, the Plan for Morocco refers to the need to "promote the role of women in social and economic progress" (Article 71), refers to the protection of pregnant women in the workplace, and to combating discrimination and violence against women, which is also a part of the Tunisian Plan. The Jordanian Action Plan foresees the implementation "of a plan to increase the proportion of women in the labour force and in the political decision-making process." The Palestinian Plan is the least developed: the word "women" appears only once in the entire document in the section on human rights, and only as part of the standard phrase on the need to "promote women's rights and ensure equal treatment and opportunities for women". ENP contributes little to the rights of women. Indeed, it can be said that gender equality was relegated to the background. This might be justified by the absence of women on the negotiation table. We seem to forget that involving women in the negotiation will allow, on one hand introducing gender equality, as a specific provision of the agreement. On the other hand, women will have the opportunity to bring their knowledge, experience, apprehensions and ambitions.

The five year working program, adopted on the 10th Anniversary Euro-Mediterranean Summit, designed to provide the basis for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation for the next five years, has tackled the women's right dimension.

The Five-Year Work Programme signals a definite improvement. It states that the partners will adopt measures "to achieve gender equality, preventing all forms of discrimination and ensuring the protection of the rights of women". And calls for a significant" Increase the participation of women in decision-making including in political, social, cultural and economic positions. This constitutes an important symbolic step and, moreover, the objectives are clear, relatively well-defined and prone to evaluation.

However, the Work Programme has no "road map" or timetable about when and to what extent partner governments should implement these goals. Further, the Work Programme is not politically binding and on the basis of past experience this is unlikely to induce much change. In this context, the ministerial meeting should address the issue of how to ensure that clear objectives are also accompanied by clear benchmarks and evaluation mechanisms.

Evaluation:

However we can't deny the profound changes that have taken place in the Euro Mediterranean area over the last few years in women's rights. Several states of the region have made advances in the area of public law rights, recognising the political rights of women with new constitutions and law that enshrine the right to participate in politics and public affairs on an equal footing, training to enable women to exercise such rights, quota systems and, in some instances, positive discrimination mechanisms in national assemblies.

While the participation and representation of women is undoubtedly increasing, they are still marginalised in decision-making centres and many obstacles remain, mainly the lack of access to political life and decision making positions. The level of women's participation in political life and the number of women in high ranking positions are very low in the south as well as in the north. This in turn leads to a system where gender policies and issues are not taken into account and women's voices are not heard.

But what are the reasons for this lack of access to political life and decision making positions. We can argue that access to political decision making positions is limited for 4 reasons:

1. Patriarchal states
2. Lack of culture of active citizenship and ownership of rights. The culture of political parties as well as that of political life partly explains why women do not or cannot run as candidates. This is a small link in the bigger chain of the traditions and culture of the society and explains the way women are treated in general.
3. Women's position in the society. Traditionally women have been seen as caretakers who stay at home. This belief affects women's participation in political as well as economic life.
4. Sometimes the problem is the awareness partly because women are not aware of their own rights or how to ask for their implementation. Or simply because women's voices are not heard in the public sphere. The media has a lot of responsibility in this as well.

However, the participation of women in the Barcelona process is more significant on the NGO's level. Important intervention and efficient actions are undertaken in the civil forums which take place before the euromed ministerial conferences. However, their impact hardly reached the deciding authorities and the forum declarations have not been taken into consideration by the ministerial consultations.

Women's organisations are helping to raise the political, economic and social profile of women and women's rights issues across the region, challenging patriarchal states, as well as political parties and movements to extend rights in accordance with their national and international commitments".

Parliamentary women are also very active, the Euro-mediterranean Assembly, succeeding the euro-mediterranean parliamentary forum in 2003, has created a permanent parliamentary committee on women's rights (2006) and despite initial resistance women's rights has become a central topic of debate. It is a very suitable arena for promoting mutual learning on women's rights and gender issues.

Immigrant women are one of the forgotten elements of the Euro-Mediterranean relationship. They have enormous potential to contribute to strengthening the civil society ties between north and south, and to economic development in the south given the growing significance of immigrant remittances.

Recommendations:

Women's rights are part of human rights in general and as human rights are universal, they are also indivisible. If we want to ensure the respect of women's rights we should make sure there is respect in general for human rights. Also there can be no full democracy where the rights of half of the population are not equal in legal, political and socio-economic terms"

Article 2 of all the association agreements explicitly states that "relations between the parties, as well as all the provisions of the agreements, shall be based on respect of democratic principles and fundamental human rights as set out in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which guides their internal and international policy and constitutes an essential element of the agreement,". Thus In compliance with the Beijing Platform of Action (1995), the MDG, the 2001 European Consensus, the 2001 Programme of Action for the Mainstreaming of Gender Equality in development cooperation, the 2006 Communication on A European Vision on Gender Equality in Development Cooperation (The European commission practice the mainstreaming ¹ in its' development cooperation policy), and the March 2006 Commission Roadmap for Equality between Men and Women: 2006-2010, the rights of women must be *mainstreamed* into all EMP official policies, and governments should be encouraged to adopt a similar position and cease to treat the rights of women as an isolated issue. The decision to organise a Euro-Mediterranean ministerial conference on the rights of women next month (November 2006) constitutes an opportunity to redress this omission, and to put the rights of women at the forefront of the Barcelona Process.

As to ensure women's enjoyment of their rights, the environment they live in should be taken into account. Inequality in the access to education, training, employment, equal pay, economic resources, ownership, etc lead to economic dependence and thus a denial of autonomy for women.

1 As defined by the United Nations, gender main streaming is: " ... the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated." The Report of the Economic and Social Council for 1997. United Nations, 1997.

Awareness raising campaigns for both men and women especially for law enforcement agencies such as police, judges, courts, lawyers and media. As I mentioned earlier, sometimes it is not the lack of proper legislation that is the problem, but the true implementation of this legislation. This is partly due to the lack of awareness both among women on their rights and also among law enforcement officers on gender issues. Media is also important since it plays a big role in forming public opinion.

All euro-mediterranean countries have signed and endorsed the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, effective implementation of this convention is recommended.

More important funds, dedicated to «positive actions >> in favor of women can be an important instrument to achieve significant progress in women's position.

The promotion of the rights and participation of women cannot be seen from a classic northsouth cooperation perspective, and must be treated more as a Euro-Mediterranean challenge. Patriarchy and discrimination are a reality in the north as well. Exchange of information on women's issues between the EU and Med countries. Good practices should be shared.

Strengthening Civil Society in general and women NGOs in particular. A strong women's movement should be formed and supported. These organizations can work for a common agenda of improving living standards of women and lobbying for both changes in the legislation and the implementation of laws.

Equal participation of men and women in the consultation mechanisms of the EuroMed partnership. If the EuroMed partnership is to suggest ways of improving women's conditions in the Mediterranean region, the partnership itself first needs to improve its policy towards women.

Malta, 28th October 2006