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**First meeting on participation of women in public life  
in the framework of the Eastern Partnership Facility**

**Tbilisi, 7 and 8 February 2012**

*(Summary of discussions)*

**Sheraton Metechi Palace Hotel  
20 Telavi Street  
Tbilisi, Georgia**

## 1. Opening of the meeting

All speakers who provided opening remarks emphasised how the unequal representation of women threatens democratic development of society on one side and how, on the other side, their activation in civil, political and social life positively impacts the legitimacy of democratic institutions, even under a polarised political environment. Accordingly, increasing motivation and setting up certain projects and programs is essential, notably meetings like this one represent a step forward in that direction.

Mr Zurab Kharatishvili, Chairman of the Central Election Commission (CEC) of Georgia, the host country of the seminar, opened the meeting by emphasising the commitment of the Georgian CEC to discussing important issues such as women's participation in political, civil and social life. Mr Kharatishvili provided concrete examples of the CEC involvement in this field, such as roundtables organised on gender balance and women's representation and participation in political and social life, which resulted in concrete recommendations to the law-makers; as well as upcoming BRIDGE (Building Resources in Democracy, Governance & Elections) trainings on Gender and Elections. Mr Kharatishvili also pointed to the establishment within the CEC of a special permanent group working on gender issues, aiming at supporting and developing gender policy for the CEC, in line with international standards. Mr Kharatishvili concluded by re-affirming the CEC's full readiness to participate in similar meetings and to actively cooperate in the future.

Mrs Rusudan Kervalishvili, Deputy Chairperson of the Parliament of Georgia, echoed Mr Kharatishvili's enthusiasm about the event and the importance of systematic involvement of women as a factor contributing to the strengthening of democratic institutions. Women's participation in political life represents a challenge in the political environment in Georgia, especially in view of the upcoming parliamentary elections. Georgia has a low proportion of women in the lower house of parliament (6 per cent), as elected in 2008, as well as in the elected municipal councillors (10%). Mrs Kervalishvili emphasised the commitment of the Parliament of Georgia to gender equality, which led to the adoption, in 2010, of a specific law, which established, *inter alia*, a Gender Equality Council, as well as a National Action Plan for Gender Equality. Finally, Mrs Kervalishvili recalled that women's role in political life has to be strengthened not only in Georgia, but also universally.

Mr Boris Iarochevitch, Deputy Head of the EU Delegation to Georgia, presented the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) as a very ambitious programme, within which progress has already been achieved in several fields, including in terms of visa facilitation and Association Agreements, though developing at a different speed in different countries. Progress with respect to women's rights, including the increase of their participation in political and economic life remains a top priority for the ENP, according to Mr Iarochevitch. In order to strengthen women's rights, a number of initiatives should be taken a precondition would be their representation at all levels of life. Finally, Mr Iarochevitch confirmed that the European Union watches closely the developments in this field in Georgia and the other countries of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and expressed the hope that the first meeting on participation of women in public life in the EaP context would have a positive outcome.

Ms Caterina Bolognese, Head of the Council of Europe Office in Georgia, and chair of the meeting, underlined the crucial importance of both the European Union (EU) and the Council of Europe (CoE)'s commitment to the EaP, as well as their joint efforts and co-operation, for the realisation of the meeting. The CoE has always been very active as a promoter of standards and values in the field of women's rights, citing as an example the 2011 Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, an instrument which is still to enter into force. Ms Bolognese referred to some official figures from 2010, which show that amongst participant countries, the percentage of female members of parliament (MPs) in Moldova reached almost 19%, in Azerbaijan 16%, in Armenia 9%, in Ukraine 8% and in Georgia 6.5%, while Belarus had the highest one (over 30%). These figures raise a number of questions about the identification of future steps to undertake in order to raise the number of women in political parties lists, the important role of the media and possible ways to reconcile professional and domestic life. Finally, Ms Bolognese referred to the first evaluation report for Georgia of the CoE's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA), which was published the same day of the seminar.

## **2. Presentation of the Council of Europe Eastern Partnership Facility**

The Council of Europe Secretariat briefly presented the context of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), as launched in May 2009 in Prague, and the EaP Facility, of which this project is part. The aim of the EaP Facility is to provide support to reform processes in the six partner countries and bring them closer to CoE and EU standards in core areas such as public administration and electoral standards; judicial reform; fighting cybercrime and corruption, and promoting good governance, by creating regional networks and platforms in a multilateral shape, respecting differences between the countries. Free and fair elections being one of the fundamental elements of a democracy, support to these is, therefore, an important component of the EaP Facility. The Secretariat recalled that the elections part of the EaP comprise three major elements:

- a) Capacity building for electoral administrations, whose lead is undertaken by the CoE's Venice Commission;
- b) Support to election observation by civil society;
- c) Voters' awareness, whose expected result is to ensure that voters are better aware of their role in the functioning of democratic elections and increase their participation in the whole process, and not just during the election day. The Secretariat explained that the event in Tbilisi was under this pillar.

Following the presentation, all participants were requested to present themselves, express their expectations from the seminar and address some preliminary questions. Participants included female parliamentarians and civil society representatives from the Eastern Partnership countries, one representative from the Parliamentary Assembly (the Head of the Turkish Delegation to the PACE), selected Council of Europe experts on gender issues and on elections, including one expert of the Venice Commission. The CoE Office in Tbilisi, the Central Electoral Commission of Georgia, representatives from the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, and the European Union Delegation in Tbilisi also attended this event.

### **3. Gender issues in elections and political parties** (*Ms Anne Grandvoinet, Venice Commission expert*)

An overview of the international instruments (starting from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 until the most recent European Codes and Declarations) on gender issues in elections and political parties was provided by a Venice Commission expert. The expert went on showing some figures from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) indicating the evolution of percentage of women elected in single or lower houses since 1945, as well as specific figures concerning EaP countries.

Following the general introduction, participants were divided into four thematic working groups. Discussion subjects covered the specific barriers encountered by women under four different steps leading to their election in Parliament, and advise on practical solutions. The different steps concern: 1) to be eligible; 2) to become an aspirant candidate; 3) how to be a candidate and; 4) to be elected. A rapporteur from each group presented the conclusions of their work and this was followed by a general discussion.

Barriers preventing women to enter into politics under different steps can be of a different nature (cultural, historical, political, economical and institutional). In many cases, access to politics for women is almost restricted from the start (for example, in some countries the preliminary conditions to enter into politics hamper women's eligibility from the outset, for example a university degree or a language test or complex registration procedures). In order to become an aspirant candidate, the type of national electoral system and the lack of financial resources can be objective barriers, and at the same time the existence of stereotypes-then amplified by the media- impede the overcoming of these barriers. It is also problematic for a woman to become an official candidate, under social disapproval, financial difficulties, media stereotyping and so on. Finally, the absence of quota in parliaments in many cases contributes to lessen chances for women's election.

Possible measures mentioned by the working groups in order to overcome the various barriers could include: amendments to national legislation with regard to labour code on parental leave; promotion of solidarity amongst women themselves; involvement of men; the commitment of international organisations in supporting national processes; education, starting from schools; empowerment of women through NGO participation and training/promotion of each other; training of media representatives and editors in order to combat stereotyping as well as possible implementation of gender monitoring structures within the media; role of electoral administration, political parties and laws in establishing gender quotas (either legally binding quotas, embedded in the Constitution or in the electoral law or voluntary party quotas) and adapting funding and institutional factors to favour women's representation.

### **4. Reconciliation of professional and family life – the Swedish example** (*Ms Anita Nyber, Department of Ethnology, History of Religions and Gender Studies, Stockholm University*)

Ms Nyber took the floor introducing the subject 'Reconciliation of Professional and family life' taking the example of the Swedish Parliament as a point of departure, by first providing some figures. In Sweden, the share of women in Parliament today is of 45% More than half of the members of parliament are below 50 years old, which implies that

many of them potentially can have pre-school or school-age children. Several measures were introduced in Sweden in order to reconcile professional and family life, not only for parliamentarians but for society in general. Some facts: parental leave is of 16 months, of which two months are reserved for the father and two for the mother; parental allowance is 90% of wages for the parliamentarians; there are also 10 father's days in direct connection with the birth of the child and paid leave to take care of sick children; childcare is financed by the State; there are tax deductions for household-related services. In the Swedish Parliament, there is a Speaker's Network for Gender Equality, which raises awareness on gender equality through seminars and lectures, and by networking with similar bodies in other parliaments. There is also a network for female parliamentarians, known as "Q-sam", which meets once a year to discuss issues of common concern, and a Men's Parliamentary Network, which primarily is concerned with specific political issues, such as trafficking.

In the case of Sweden it was noted that already in the 1960s and 1970s, when gender equality appeared on the political agenda, it did not only concern women's employment but also men's responsibility for domestic work and childcare. It has taken longer to get fathers to take a greater responsibility for domestic and care work.

A very interesting discussion followed, during which participants made several questions about the Swedish structures, mentalities and special conditions, that might have facilitated women's rights in the social and political life.

## **5. Media coverage and gender**

*(Ms Margaret Gallagher, Media and Gender Expert)*

The topic on 'Media Coverage and Gender', presented by Ms Gallagher on day two of the seminar, proved to be of considerable interest to the majority of the participants. The speaker provided several examples, supported by data and video clips, of how women are under-represented in the media, and how they are often victims of sexist stereotypes representing them in the roles traditionally assigned by society.

The expert went on highlighting how gender differences and stereotypes in the field of politics matter even more profoundly, because politics and political decision-making affect the lives of all, men and women. In this respect, some striking examples were provided about the media coverage of the British general election campaign in 2010, as well as the 2008 American presidential campaign. Journalists and programme-makers who report on the political world need to be especially aware of those gender differences and stereotypes, because of the way they can influence political priorities and decisions. At the same time, it is important to recognise that the failure to include women in certain kinds of media content is simply a mirror of sidelining of women in the society in general, as a result of a spectrum of social and cultural mechanisms, beliefs, practices and assumptions. This has been well documented by research, and the expert shared a few findings with the audience. Every five years since 1995, the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) has provided a one-day snapshot of "who makes the news" in the newspapers, radio, and television of about 100 countries round the world<sup>1</sup>. Results

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<sup>1</sup> All of the Global Media Monitoring Reports can be downloaded from [www.whomakesthenews.org](http://www.whomakesthenews.org).

across the studies<sup>2</sup> (from 1995 to 2010) are strikingly consistent and show how everywhere, in the world's news, expert opinion is overwhelmingly male. With respect to female politicians, one of the most harmful forms of media stereotyping is the denial of women's authority and leadership. In general, male politicians get a disproportionately large share of the coverage.<sup>3</sup> And even when they are given space in the media, women in public life are frequently undermined by sexist comment or questioning.

The relationship between the media, whose power is widely recognised, and the political sphere has always been recognised as vitally important. The expert concluded her presentation by citing a sentence by the historian Thomas Carlyle: 'he who can speak to the whole nation becomes powerful; but he must have a voice that others will listen to'. The expert commented that today we know that not just 'he', but also 'she' must have a voice and that if the media are to be the guardians of democracy and defenders of the public interest in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, media coverage needs to reflect the fact that both men and women have voices, that these voices sometimes say different things and express different priorities; and that the free expression of these differences is central to the exercise of citizenship and to the participation of women in public life.

During the animated debate that followed the presentation, many interesting ideas were suggested in order to turn the media from women's 'enemies' to 'allies', as the media are often unaware of how its work perpetuates gender stereotypes. Therefore, there seems to be a need to involve them into discussion in a professional manner. There is a need to encourage journalists and media professionals to monitor their own output, by first of all rendering them aware of gender imbalances and stereotyping in their work. The need for training and awareness-raising of journalists and editors, including the involvement of men, was raised by many participants. Bringing together journalists and female politicians in informal meetings can also be very effective (example of Ukraine). It is also important to develop media education among young people and the public in general, for example like in Armenia, where a module on gender and journalism for use in schools and in higher education was developed. On the other end, women themselves (politicians and aspirant politicians) need training on media awareness, in order for them to handle media interviews and to optimise their general media presentation.

Finally, in relation to public service media, it was recommended that Press Councils and other self-regulatory mechanisms need to take gender balance seriously, because of the responsibilities that freedom of expression carries, and include it in the criteria they use to evaluate public media.

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<sup>2</sup> Some figures: the first study, published in 1995, found that women were only 17% of the world's news subjects—the people who are interviewed or whom the news is about. Fifteen years later, in 2010, the figure had risen - but only to 24%. In other words, out of every four people we see and hear in the news, three are men. Everywhere, in the world's news, expert opinion is overwhelmingly male: men represent 80% of experts and 81% of spokespersons (even in stories that affect women profoundly, such as gender-based violence). In 2010, 60% of news subjects in these stories were men. The 2010 GMMF found that only 6% of news stories dealt in any way with issues of gender equality or inequality. Finally, if women in general are marginalised, certain categories of women – older women, ethnic minority women – are practically invisible.

<sup>3</sup> The GMMF study of 2010 found a gross under-representation of female politicians in the news of almost 100 countries. The proportion of news coverage given to female politicians was considerably lower than the proportion of women in politics. For instance in Sweden, only 19% of politicians in the news were women, although in fact 45% of the country's politicians are women.

## 6. Conclusions

Participants and experts agreed that the two-day seminar was a great opportunity for everyone to exchange ideas, experiences and suggestions, under a multilateral format (EaP). In order to document this exchange and keep the group in contact, it was suggested to create a mailing list, send pictures and ask volunteer participants to share short comments which could be put on the internet website of the EaP Facility, in order to spread the message. Participants expressed the wish for this group to have further occasions in the future to meet and continue their goals. A general conclusion was that participation of women in public life could only be achieved when women unite and co-operate in synergy and when men are included in the process.

The following proposals were formulated at the end of the meeting:

### A. Training of aspirant female candidates politicians:

To develop a general curriculum to train aspirant female candidates politicians and to organise a general training session, possibly in co-operation with participating NGOs, building from some previous experience, including from civil society. The training could focus on different aspects of the work of a politician, national and international legislation, fundraising, media awareness and other relevant topics. The training would also be an exchange of experiences, ideas and proposals between the already elected women and the ones outside politics. Parliamentarians present at the meeting agreed to participate in the training by exchanging their experiences with the future generations.

### B. Training for Media:

To organise a training for journalists, including directors of schools of journalism, on media and gender, in order to discuss ways of combating stereotyping. Amongst the objectives of the seminar, there would also be the possibility to make schools of journalism commit to include gender issues in their curriculum. The training could build on already developed training methodology which was mentioned during the seminar.

### C. Other follow-up steps:

In order to keep the momentum going, the Secretariat will:

- Collect best practices/ personal stories/challenges encountered in the political life from participants and make these available on the EaP Facility website;
- Organise a meeting in a year time in order to evaluate the progress of the above- mentioned proposals and to discuss some specific topics in detail.