



KORČULA SCHOOL 2012
“POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES IN SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE –IMPACT ON GENDER EQUALITY”

6-8 September 2012



MESSAGES

In an open, frank and substantive political dialogue the 24 participants – women members of European and national parliaments, women politicians and activists, academic - from the CEE region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary, Montenegro Serbia, Slovenia) and from France, Greece, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain), who participated in the Korčula School formulated the following messages.

- The political, economic, social and cultural challenges of today require that progressive and left political forces not only clearly and boldly articulate a new, innovative and sustainable long-term vision for Europe and its citizens, women and men, but immediate action. In an interconnected world, Europe should actively cooperate in finding just global economic and social solutions in the interest of citizens throughout our planet, based on a long-term vision and not ad hoc actions without direction.

Europe’s basic principles and values, and those of the social-democratic movement, that are the civilization acquis of the French Revolution and the Age of the Enlightenment, are threatened by

a conservative backlash with a potential to reverse already attained human rights and gains. Its economic and social model is also threatened and can easily be dismantled at the expense of Europe's citizens, its peace and security and its future.

Progressive forces should lead this articulation and implementation, lest they be overtaken by conservative and right wing politics which have a different interpretation of Europe's fundamental values. We have learnt this in the last twenty years on the gender equality issue – the right has been espousing our cause for gender equality but in a conflicting sense – changing legislation. Europe does not need piecemeal solutions but a coherent political, economic and social model for the 21st century based on the already adopted PES documents, work and activities and the basic tenets and fundamental rights as guaranteed by the EU. It is about implementation, agility to adapt, adjust and enforce as we learn from our fight for gender equality. It is not about social or economic Europe – it is both. It is not about human rights without gender equality – we need participatory, representative, active and parity democracy, social justice, equal opportunities and human rights for all Europe's citizens.

Political parties can achieve this vision only through broad societal partnerships. It needs to be articulated and argumentative in a manner that can be understood by all citizens, which among others demands that we work closely with the media. It has to meet their aspirations and needs. Gender equality and women's rights should be an integral part and parcel of that vision and not an afterthought. It should provide a sustainable economic and social model for the future generations to live in and build on. Just tightening, yet again, the economic and social belt is not a solution, as pointed out in the FEPS publication « Austerity is not the answer ». We see the lines of poor people in Europe, among them especially women, young people and the migrants, growing. Social-democrats cannot tolerate poverty on a continent with so much wealth and assets! European solutions have to be cognizant of long term social and economic consequences of unemployment, poverty and social marginalisation – who will pay the tab in fifty years. They also need to be flexible enough to adapt to the changing global circumstances.

Finding innovative and productive solutions, by engaging our societies, by engaging all members of our societies, with a special focus on youth, to maximize their assets and actively participate in the “new deal” and a new economic and social European compact is crucial to our success. We cannot betray our principles and goals.

- In the difficult choices that Europe, and especially its socialist and social-democratic parties and movements, have to make to address the crisis, the hardly won human rights and especially those of women should not be lost under the blanket of opportunistic economic solutions agreed behind closed doors by conservative governments of the EU member states. We need to ensure that conservative solutions to the crisis are not sold to the people of Europe as ideological and gender neutral. This demands that we do not compromise our politics in our institutional policies when in government. Social-democrats need to be consistent with their tradition, values and vision and should not let anybody to give rights with one hand and take them away with the other.

There is no more public space for complacency and compromises with a neo-liberal model that has gone bankrupt. We cannot continue depleting our social capital, individual and family assets, annihilating the results of our investments in education, of girls and boys, universal health care and social policies which provide freedoms and economic, social and personal independence and choices for women. We cannot go back on women's rights, on gender equality, on the right to reproductive health and abortion, on sexual freedoms and diversity.

There are innovative solutions in Europe. They often stem from citizens themselves. These should be urgently studied and progressive party responses should be based on these initiatives to reactivate and reinvigorate our political, social and economic machinery. Within that the potential

and assets that women and youth hold can be crucial. Europe needs progressive alliances, inter-generational, between labour movements, civil society organisations and political parties at all levels, to identify innovative solutions out of the crisis and forge a vision for a revived Europe. A participatory process to take us out of the crisis is the only way for the citizens of Europe to understand the challenges and shape the future. Apathy will not work. We do not only need our young to learn skills but to gain knowledge so that we can jointly shape our future.

- The power of our vision and measures to turn it into reality strongly hinge on the ability of our parties and movements to meet the aspirations and reach out to all constituencies – with special focus on workers, pensioners, women, the youth and marginalised groups. But this demands that we strengthen our internal party democracy, ensure women's equal and non-negotiable representation in party leaderships, strengthen our legitimacy and credibility with the people, as politics is perceived, especially in South Eastern Europe, as a dirty and corrupt business of ambitious individuals, be they women or men. We need leaders with integrity and action with political accountability and transparency.

More young people should be won to the social-democratic/progressive cause/principles, so that the partnership towards a journey to a Europe of social justice and solidarity is enlarged. As it is our joint responsibility we need to invest in the (re)education of the young on the social-democratic values and (re)education on rights, principles and concepts like social justice and feminism, especially in the Western Balkans. Modern societies cannot be built on the archaic values. Revived patriarchy, religious fundamentalism, economic dependence of women, violence in the family and against women, curtailing of women's reproductive and sexual rights are unacceptable. We have to deal with cultural and religious stereotypes by concerted action.

To achieve this we need political leadership and political will. We need to ensure that women have an equal voice and decision making power in these. In a world driven by neo-liberal individualistic values societal solidarity and togetherness is a path to just and sustainable solutions. We have examples of women's networks that are making a difference. Let us use these lessons learnt and assets and not only when it comes to electoral campaigns in order to get women's votes. Progressive political parties should not be weary of alliances with the civil society and with women's groups, but should join hands on the common cause. And vice versa - this is not the time for fragmentation. Our leaders, women and men, today have a historic responsibility.

The participants agreed to meet again next year and to continue the Korčula Women's Political Dialogue on a select number of urgent specific themes.