

Report

"Transformative politics – women in politics –"

WHEN A WOMAN ENTERS POLITICS – SHE CHANGES

WHEN THOUSAND WOMEN ENTER POLITICS – POLITICS CHANGES

LET'S CHANGE POLITICS!



1. **Key Findings, Messages and Recommendations**

- Inequality is a systemic issue and societies change slowly. Progress on gender equality, with all the gains over time, has been slow, uneven and not a given. Transformative action and changing gender equality paradigms today demand both feminist activism (in the society and parties) and a partnership with men. This is slowly changing per force, as more women assume decision making

positions and as the economic and social environment demands a stronger equal partnership to manage everyday challenges.

- Gender equality is a test for the economic and social, political equality model of societies in general. It is a systemic problem that should therefore be addressed systematically. It is not only a matter of human rights in a narrow sense, but a matter of equality in the society as such.
- However, there seems to be a backlash on gender equality happening in Europe and the EU is lagging behind in developing and implementing its gender strategy. This is felt politically, but also financially in terms of support to women's movements in the EU but also in EU candidate countries. Without adequate political and financial commitment and backing it is difficult to make progress.
- SD parties unfortunately do not deal with gender equality issues in a systematic and emancipatory way. SD policies in many cases are not gender-sensitive, particularly in terms of a feminist perspective to urban development, environmental issues, transport, education, economy, healthcare.
- Women in SD parties are often motivated by their electoral losses and are ready to engage both externally, in assisting parties to gain political ground again, and internally to instill party democracy and build party cadres. Women are also motivated and more flexible to seek broader societal coalitions and partners outside established SD parties, as CEE Network and women's forum (WF) experience has shown.
- SD parties are as a rule male-dominated in leadership, in membership and in the electoral camp. Political parties, even when they respect the quota, position women on places that do not ensure victory as male leaders get preferential treatment on electoral lists. And yet women tend more to vote for center left parties, but this should not be taken as a given!
- Women tend to be well represented in the drafting organs of SD parties when party documents are being prepared, e.g. in LSDV 45% women participated in the drafting of the party electoral platform. In SDP Croatia it was 40% women, while in other parties the number swings around 20%. However, these teams are all led by male leaders. In SDP Montenegro 65% of women participated in election monitoring. (Source: CEE Network 2015 questionnaire to WFs).
- The glass ceiling remains an issue. As women climb the decision making ladder they tend to be isolated within leaderships. Women are also not always supporting other women as they see them as rivals in a "man's world".
- SD history and experience shows that parties lose when they are alienated from the people, the electorate, the working woman and man. SD parties in the region need to go back to their societal

1. The trends regarding women's empowerment within parties in times of elections are mixed, so the glass is nowhere half full or half empty.

2. SD parties have, slowly, started to target women voters with concrete electoral promises but their implementation is still lagging behind. Gender sensitive policies are getting their way into party documents and decisions, as well as gender sensitive language.

3. The deficit of women's power and WFs in electoral processes means that they have limited possibilities to delegate their best activists to the eligible positions on the lists and positions of executive power.

4. The Joint SD Regional Gender Equality Platform, signed by all the parties in the region is an important political tool to promote gender equality concerns and women leaders as well as to enhance capacity building of political party leaderships. This also demands the strengthening and empowerment of WFs.

equal representation both in party structures and government institutions when in power.

- More inter-generational dialogue is necessary and an interface should happen between older and young women feminists, activists and political leaders. This would strengthen coalitions and the socialdemocratic cause but also provide the necessary political and ideological perspective for the renewal and reinvigoration of the socialdemocratic movement.
- SD parties need to develop cadres with specific expertise for informed political and ideological positioning. But they also need to overcome the opportunistic attitude to follow and compete with the right by abandoning their ideological orientation. This has cost votes and blurred the political edge and ideological distinction between the left and the right and SD visibility and identity.
- Women and the youth are a substantial political actors in society and in parties. This should be recognised by SD parties, politically supported with adequate funding. Political struggle is long term, with short and medium term gains as important steps, so it should be viewed and supported with sustainability in mind. SD parties should, as much as possible refrain from one shot deals meaning also that WFs need to be sustained and supported over time. More effort should be made to continue work with women who have been trained so that they can upgrade their skills and influence and mentor other women.
- Women's forums have been created as organisations of political parties, but have also maintained their autonomy which allows for broader action and reach out to the civil society. This has not been utilised enough.
- Political academies for party cadres, including specific programmes for women, should be enhanced and sustained, while the establishment of more active networks at local level, including a sustained ideological dialogue between the national and local levels can only ensure better advocacy, outreach and party electoral results. This also means careful attention to the language used in societal dialogue so that the electorate can understand what SD stands for.
- Indepth statistical data about women in SD parties, and in general, is lacking and better and more systematic tracking is necessary to inform analysis and action.
- CEE Network should develop a gender equality educational and training toolkit, in cooperation with WFs, that could be used by all SD parties. This work needs to go hand in hand with strengthening the network itself and regular communication at regional and national levels. Today's IT technology offers many opportunities and these need to be seized.
- The Joint Regional Gender Equality Platform provides a diagnosis on the current state of social democratic parties and offers recommendations, meaning that it's implementation should be supported both by political parties within the region and beyond.
- Preparations for 2016 Korcula School should take stock of lessons learnt and upgrade the format and participation for substantive political impact.