

## **Minutes from Workshop on Women in Local Politics and Administration**

Chair: Myrofora KOSTIDOU

Speakers: Vlasta TOTH (Croatia)  
Jelene MICIVIC (Serbia)  
Monika VANA (Austria)

### **Vlasta Toth, local councillor from Zagreb**

Vlasta explained the legal background, pointing out the various laws that existed concerning such things as family abuse, gender equality, etc. This was then contrasted with statistics to show that reality was far different, for instance that only 5% of senior managers are women and women earn, on average, 15% less than men for the same work. A serious consequence is that women end up with lower pensions. Politics mirrors this situation. Only 22% of MPs are women, and a mere 3 are ministers. Women headed only 7% of political lists in the local elections of 2005.

A survey on women in political life showed that men and women both attribute their low participation to the same factors – a double workload of job+family, a patriarchal society and the perception that women are weaker than men.

Political parties bear responsibility for this, by failing to put women in significant places in their lists and, when elected, to give them responsibility for important portfolios such as finance, transport or security.

Greens have a better policy, with a minimum of 40% women on lists, and they will contest the local elections in June in several constituencies, including Zagreb, where the head of list is Vlasta.

In Croatia, the rights women have actually regressed in the 1990s compared to the times under Tito. There was much better social protection and gender equality then, enforced by sanctions.

### **Jelene Micivic, from Belgrade**

In many ways, the situation of women in Serbia is worse than in Croatia. While 20% ministers are women, in many cases it is not clear that they are not just figureheads, with a man responsible for the real decisions. A third of members of the Town Assembly of Belgrade are women and 20% of the National Assembly, but many of them are “decoration” to fulfil legal requirements, especially if they are young and beautiful. Women are not taken seriously in Serbian politics.

The laws concerning gender are improving in Serbia but only in order to

prepare for accession, not as a serious effort to improve society. A few women are visible in right-wing parties, but as supporters of family values and to justify keeping women at home.

In Serbia, as in Croatia, the situation is worse now than 20 years ago, with rights that existed having been lost. The forces of liberalisation and privatisation have been negative for women. The war was very destructive of Serbian society, and even now, the Kosovo issue is being used as an excuse to not deal with major problems, such as pollution, let alone gender equality. The courts are overloaded, the system is not trusted and consequently, women do not know where to turn for help.

### **Monika Vana, city councillor from Vienna**

Monika stressed the importance of gender issues at the local level and for mutual support and information exchange among the Green network. A Round Table of Green Local Councillors from Eastern Europe will be held in Vienna from 2 to 4 October.

The situation in Vienna is much better than in Croatia and Serbia, but problems of gender equality exist, including on Green lists in Austria. The Vienna Greens started a programme to support women in the party because, despite a rule for gender equality on the lists, most important positions were still held by men. An external evaluation was conducted to discover the stumbling blocks preventing women from joining the Green cause as a first step to improving gender equality.

It was found that the same obstacles apply as elsewhere: in meetings, men speak more often and for longer than women, are more often aggressive and are given greater attention. Women are less frequently consulted as experts. Men profit from networking, the “old boys’ club”, while women have more difficulty with competition. Men dominate panel discussions.

These findings prompted the Vienna Greens to implement a number of changes, including better political education for women, rules for better procedures at meetings (fixed speaking time, more convenient times, childcare, etc). Now the Vienna Greens have 70% women in the city council and a woman is head of the party.

Next year, the Vienna Greens and the Socialists will begin to implement a policy for public procurement, whereby firms which seek contracts must demonstrate that they meet certain minimum standards for gender equality .

There is a new backlash in Austria, with the winds of neoliberalism and conservatism, made worse by the financial crisis. While women are badly affected, most of the discussion focuses on the impact on men, since male-

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