

Session 9: Women in Leadership: women's representation in policy- and decision-making

30 October 2019

10:00 – 11:30 am, Room XVIII

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen!

Discussing the topic of women's leadership is acknowledgment of both the role of women in decision-making and the fact that there are still many manifestations of gender imbalance disfavours women and overt gender discrimination.

At the same time, my own life journey from a school teacher and a women's movement activist to a Member of Ukrainian Parliament and then to the Government Commissioner for Gender Equality shows that leadership is possible and real. It is important to set goals and move towards them.

An important achievement is that despite the pressure of public opinion and gender stereotypes that are still strong in society, women confidently stand and continue to exercise their right to participate in decision-making.

Also, more and more male decision-makers support women.

Striking examples to illustrate it are enshrining the parity of women and men in all areas of society in the Law of Ukraine "On Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men." I was adopted in 2005 when as few as 8% MPs were women, and 92%, men. Its adoption was directly influenced by the Beijing Platform for Action, as drafting of this law started shortly after the conference.

Another example is voting for gender quotas in the elections of members of local councils and supporting gender quotas at the national elections.

Yet another achievement is the support rendered to the development and consolidation of the national gender policy, improvement of legislation, and strengthening of the national mechanism for gender equality due to the women's leadership and cooperation with male politicians.

In 2016, one of the recommendations of the Beijing Platform for Action was enforced when the function on coordination of national gender policy that the Government is legally responsible for was assigned directly to the Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration – Ivanna Klymush-Tsyntsadze. Today, the cause is continued by a well-known Ukrainian politician and diplomat, HeForShe Ambassador Dmytro Kuleba.

Let's consider the dynamics of women's representation in Ukrainian Parliament: In the Parliament of the first convocation, there were only 3.5% women (1990), in the 7th and 8th convocations, we had 11% and 12.5% respectively (2012-2019). Now we have 20.5% women, or every fifth Member of Parliament.

33 % of Cabinet of Ministries members are women. Women also make:

- 14.4% members of oblast councils,
- 23.5% members of district councils
- 24.8% members of councils of cities of regional importance
- 31.7% members of councils of cities of rayon importance
- 46% members of settlement councils
- and 54.3% members of village councils.

However, an analysis of the gender composition of local councils evidently demonstrates that the lower the level of decision-making, the higher the representation of women.

The key obstacles to improve it at national and local levels are:

- Gender stereotypes in society as well as among politicians, including in parties and among party leaders;
- Women's low level of self-confidence;
- Lower level of income and financial resources in women compared to men, which limits the fulfilment of their leadership opportunities;
- A lot of unpaid work performed by women, including child care and care for other family members;
- Suboptimal level of development of child care infrastructure;
- Unequal distribution of family responsibilities. (You will not ask who performs most part of them, will you?)

The responsibility of political parties and all actors/stakeholders in the political spectrum for achieving gender equality targets set by the Sustainable Development Goals is about strengthening the pressure of the women's movement, on one hand, and enhancing national gender policy, on the other. The Law of Ukraine "On Political Parties in Ukraine" enables political parties to receive funding for their statutory activities from the state budget; the funding depends on the number of votes cast. Complying with gender quota (30% voluntary gender quota in election lists of candidates) allows to receive additional funds from the state budget. A total of 10% of the annual amount of budget for funding of statutory activities of political parties is equally distributed between the parties, provided that MPs of one sex make at least one third of the total number of MPs from parties who made it to the Parliament.

The question about the most important actors in driving change is somewhat provocative. Government, Parliament, political parties, politicians themselves, education system and journalists are equally important.

However, there is one important actor who has been a serious initiator, motivator, implementer, partner and watchdog in the implementation of gender policy and the promotion of women's political participation. It is about civil society – first and foremost, women's NGOs and the women's movement.

A well-developed women's movement, women's NGOs that demonstrate a deep understanding of pressing issues, extend support to women, are active and dedicated are a huge capital of Ukrainian society and the nation. At the same time, NGOs not only know all the problems, but also engage in the development and implementation of public policy, making a real impact on decision-making. I personally worked this way up with civil society, starting shortly before the 1995 Beijing conference.

One thing to note is no changes will happen automatically. By themselves. The changes we seek require our joint efforts – efforts to be taken by the government, political parties, women's movement, civil society in general, international organizations. Democracy is not inevitable. Democratic changes neither. We know this well in Ukraine. Because we thought that after the 2004 Orange Revolution, the country was firmly on the path to democracy. Not at all! We paid heavily for this confidence during the Revolution of Dignity and continue to pay for it during the Russian occupation of Crimea and parts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. It is our pay for the pursuit of democracy. Of freedom, human rights and the rule of law. Democracy, human rights, women's rights, gender equality must be constantly and continually fought for. And I wish us all victory in this fight!