

# EIGE marks 100 years of International Women's day



This year International Women's Day celebrates its 100th anniversary, a day of recognition and paying homage to the economic, political and social achievements of women.

International Women's Day provides us all with the opportunity to cast our minds back to former struggles and accomplishments. It creates an arena where measuring the advancement of remaining challenges together with assessing them become a reality. In order to assess the situation a propos equality between women and men in Europe, the European Institute for Gender Equality has examined publicly available data and has formulated 100 areas where inequalities still persist today to illustrate tribute to the past achievements of women; whilst testifying to the ubiquitous gaps. That largely we are still in fact a long way from achieving gender equality.

Is it for instance fair that women aged 25 to 44 spend three times longer than men, in childcare (60 minutes per day for women to 22 minutes for men)? Is it justified that only 2% of ministers in Europe are women? Isn't it frightening that statistically, every fourth woman has experienced physical violence at least once during their adult lives?

One hundred years ago, the first International Women's Day came into being as an initiative by the governments of Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland. Ever since more than one million women and men have attended International Women's Day rallies campaigning for working, ballot, education and decision-making rights as well as rallying for the eventual end of violence against women and discrimination.

In 2010 EIGE launched its Women of Europe calendar. Its primary purposes include the inspiration of individual women and society at large, to highlight their achievements regardless of national, ethnic, cultural or economic diversity – as well as to present positive examples of non-stereotypical roles and success stories of women of Europe. Preparations for its second successive calendar which nominations are mostly welcome for are currently underway.

### **A short timeline**

This past century has borne witness to many significant achievements where expanding and securing women's rights are concerned – all essential landmarks in the improvement of European politics, economies and social structures. Notwithstanding the proposal of English philosopher John Stuart Mill in the late 1860s; to replace the term 'man' with 'person' which was greeted with ridicule and mockery in the House of Commons, the British women's movement and the final campaign which Millicent Fawcett and Emmeline Pankhurst led, forced the bill through which went on to allow women over the age of 30 to vote, in 1918. In a number of Nordic countries, women won the right to vote even earlier: in 1906 in Finland, in 1913 in Norway, and in 1915 in Denmark and Iceland.

Yielding to the pressure of society and feminist movements, many European countries reformed marriage acts which granted spouses equal rights, married women legal majority and economic equality and adopted laws on equal salaries for both sexes. Sweden further progressed by allowing women to become priests in 1958 – a mere 50 years ago! And the United Kingdom had not proclaimed marital rape illegal in England and Wales until 1991.

Undeniably, the establishment of the European Union and the claim to equality between women and men as one of its core values has played a major role in the consolidation of Europe. This has in turn contributed to the commitment towards equality between women and men, including the protection of fundamental rights, combating discrimination, strengthening social cohesion and mobilising women's full potential for economic growth and prosperity across the EU.

Starting from the European policies of equal opportunities and equal possibilities for women and men in the area of employment, during late 90s the EU has embarked on numerous political strategies - including strategies for special gender equality measures and gender mainstreaming.

The European Commission Strategy for Equality between Women and Men (2010-2015) and its five priority areas (equal economic independence; equal pay for equal work and work of equal value; equality in decision making; dignity, integrity and tackling gender-based violence; and gender equality in external relations) is an excellent example of goals and measures which unite Europe under its core value of equality between women and men.

Inspired by greater equality in legislative rights, growing numbers of women in employment or decision making bodies and increased visibility in public life, one could misleadingly find themselves in a position to believe that women have finally accomplished true equality. A recent 2009 Special Eurobarometer report on Gender Equality found that 62% of Europeans believe that gender inequality was widespread, despite the majority of Europeans agreeing that it was less widespread than 10 years previously.

With great dismay, women still compose a mere fraction in top business management positions. Among the largest publicly listed companies in the EU Member States, 38% have no women on the boards and only 28% have more than one. In 2010, women accounted for an average of 24% of members of national parliaments in the EU and EU women still earn approximately 17.5% less than their male counterparts.

Reliable data and information exhibits concrete facts and makes inequality difficult to ignore and these 100 examples of inequality demonstrate the gaps and challenges that await us.

The European Institute for Gender Equality is making extensive efforts in the contribution of making equality between women and men a reality for all and believes that women deserve to live purposeful lives, to be acknowledged and to be respected.