

Levelling the Playing Field: Women's Rights in Modern Liberal Europe

The Congress of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party convening virtually on 11-12 June 2021:

Believing that:

- gender equality and respect between all genders is an integral step on the way towards more liberal and open-minded values in our societies;
- a truly liberal gender policy should take as its starting point the individual human beings and their rights, regardless of gender;
- global gender equality goes hand in hand with the reduction of poverty, a general economic and social development, and democratisation;
- women should have the same legal and political rights and opportunities as men;
- the empowerment and autonomy of girls and women, and improvements in their political, social, economic and health status, are essential to the achievement of sustainable development;
- it is utterly important to have an active presence of all genders in politics. There is a need for the participation and representation of all genders in decision-making bodies as a first step in ensuring well-balanced decisions that reflect the societies that they legislate for;
- each person has autonomy over their own body. Sexual and reproductive rights rest on the recognition of the right of all individuals to autonomy over their own body as a fundamental human right;
- it is crucial for liberals to fight for the right of individuals to take autonomous decisions over their own sexual and reproductive health rights.

Noting that:

- in the European Union, women earn on average 16% per hour less than men;
- only 15% of mayors and 29% of regional representatives/local councillors in Europe are women, resulting in a lack of representation of women's issues at a local and regional level;
- the ratio of women MEPs increased from 36% to 39% in the last elections to the European Parliament, but despite this, men still account for a big majority of MEPs;
- the average rate of employment among women in the EU is 67.3%, while it is 79% for men, resulting in a gender employment gap of 11.7 percentage points;

Resolution:

Levelling the Playing Field: Women's Rights in Modern Liberal Europe

Year and Congress:

eCongress, June 2021

Category:

Fundamental Freedoms and Rights

Page:

1

- through additional costs on women's products ("Pink Tax"), women pay 13% more for personal care products and 8% more for health care products than men;
- feminine sanitary products are categorised as luxury products and therefore their levies varies within the EU and can sometimes reach the Standard Rate (22% in Italy, 25% in Denmark or 27% in Hungary). This tax has unfair social and economic repercussions for women;
- the pandemic has deepened existing inequalities between women and men. Domestic violence reports increased in numerous countries during the lockdowns (in France 32% during the first week, in Lithuania 20% in the first three weeks). Economic sectors with overrepresentation of women (retail, hospitality, care and domestic work) were worst affected by the crisis and have had greater difficulties to re-enter the market.

Considering that:

- one in three women in the EU have been victims of physical violence; one in two have been sexually harassed; and around two in five women have endured psychological violence;
- women may experience multiple intersectional discriminations and challenges arising from the intersection of gender combined with sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics, age, racial or ethnic origin;
- some European countries such as Poland and Croatia have announced intentions to leave the Istanbul Convention and Turkey will officially withdraw from the Convention on 1 July 2021. The Istanbul Convention is a treaty that requires signatories to adopt legislation prosecuting domestic violence and other forms of abuse against women;
- six EU Member States have still not ratified the Istanbul Convention;
- although the general trend has been one of progress towards liberalisation, in recent years some countries in Europe have witnessed attempts to roll back existing legal protections for women's access to abortion. For example, Poland, a Member State of the European Union, has enforced a near-total ban on abortion and has also taken the first steps toward leaving the Istanbul Convention.
- at the current pace, it will take around 100 years to achieve gender equality in Europe.

Recognising that:

- there is a clear need for having fair representation of all genders in different areas of life - research, business, labour market and, last but not least, in decision-making;

Resolution:

Levelling the Playing Field: Women's Rights in Modern Liberal Europe

Year and Congress:

eCongress, June 2021

Category:

Fundamental Freedoms and Rights

Page:

2

- it is the responsibility of governments at all levels to create the conditions which will enable women to exercise their personal autonomy and ensure that they are adequately represented in the process of democratic self-determination;
- Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights should also be promoted as an element of equal opportunity and development;
- forcing women to procure illegal abortions jeopardises women's health and potentially threatens their lives;
- forcing victims of rape and incest to carry pregnancies to term is an assault on their autonomy and dignity, and jeopardises their mental and physical health.

Calls for:

- ALDE member parties to actively work to uphold the principle that the rights of girls and women are an inalienable and indivisible part of human rights, to be protected not only in areas of public life but also in the privacy of the home;
- political commitment at the European level and the definition of targets and indicators to achieve substantive gender equality with regard to taxation;
- ALDE member parties to recognise reproductive decision-making, including choice in marriage, family formation, and determination of the number, timing and spacing of one's children; and the right to the information and the safe means to exercise those choices;
- ALDE member parties to encourage and promote all under-represented genders within their organisations as it makes politics more representative, the political outcome more balanced and the results more sustainable, as well as to put all effort in to reaching a fair distribution of gender within their organisation and make initiatives to combat any existing gender gap or gender discrimination and ensure that work of equal value is paid equally for men and women;
- ALDE member parties to fight for the introduction of Sexual Education and Information as mandatory part of the school programme: this includes comprehensive courses on contraception and the effects of pregnancy on the body, as well as the discussion of topics such as consent, boundaries and healthy relationships;
- ALDE member parties to encourage the extension of affordable childcare and elderly care, as well as the introduction of separate income taxation, as means to facilitate for women to take up full-time employment;
- the European governments to introduce a burden-shared parental leave policy that ensures that all employers offer sufficient parental leave, regardless of the gender of their employees. We support the introduction of greater entitlements to paternity leave in all Member

Resolution:

Levelling the Playing Field: Women's Rights in Modern Liberal Europe

Year and Congress:

eCongress, June 2021

Category:

Fundamental Freedoms and Rights

Page:

3

States. In order to push for greater sharing of parental leave, we support that a certain share of the parental leave is earmarked to the father. Additionally, we support that every European state progressively ensures that every child under school age in Europe has access to an affordable day-care centre;

- Member States to guarantee and promote universal access to a full range of sexual reproductive health and rights services, including abortion and would encourage Member States to seek consensus on this matter;
- European countries to remove criminal sanctions for abortion practices;
- all European states, in particular the Members States of the European Union, to ratify and fully implement the Istanbul Convention without delay;
- European leaders to work together towards completely eradicating Female Genital Mutilation in Europe and worldwide and to take preventive and protective initiatives for girls and women at risk;
- European countries to bring their legislation on rape in line with international standards and to define rape on the basis of the absence of consent.

Resolution:

Levelling the Playing Field: Women's Rights in Modern Liberal Europe

Year and Congress:

eCongress, June 2021

Category:

Fundamental Freedoms and Rights

Page:

4