



ЕВРОПЕЙСКИ ПАРЛАМЕНТ PARLAMENTO EUROPEO EVROPSKÝ PARLAMENT EUROPA-PARLAMENTET
EUROPÄISCHES PARLAMENT EUROOPA PARLAMENT ΕΥΡΩΠΑΪΚΟ ΚΟΙΝΟΒΟΥΛΙΟ EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
PARLEMENT EUROPEÛEN PARLAIMINT NA HEORPA PARLAMENTO EUROPEO EIROPAS PARLAMENTS
EUROPOS PARLAMENTAS EUROPAI PARLAMENT IL-PARLAMENT EWROPEW EUROPEES PARLEMENT
PARLAMENT EUROPEJSKI PARLAMENTO EUROPEU PARLAMENTUL EUROPEAN
EVROPSKY PARLAMENT EVROPSKI PARLAMENT EUROOPAN PARLAMENTTI EUROOPAPARLAMENTET



Women's rights in Turkey: attitudes must change

Progress has been made on women's rights in Turkey in recent years but much remains to be done, according to the speakers at a public hearing held by the EP Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee on Thursday. Constitutional and legislative measures can only achieve so much: society's attitudes need to change too.

The need to protect women against violence and trafficking and to improve their educational opportunities were among the issues highlighted in the introduction to the hearing - titled "The role of women in Turkey in social, economic and political life" - given by MEP Emine Bozkurt (PES, NL), the author of EP reports on women in Turkey in 2005 and 2007. It was not enough to adopt new laws, she said, these laws also need to be implemented. There are now about 50 women's shelters in Turkey and another eight in construction but according to the law there should be a shelter in any city of over 50,000 inhabitants. This means there should be at least 231 shelters in Turkey."

Nimet Çubukçu, Turkey's state minister of women's and children's affairs, agreed. She first pointed out that Articles 9 and 10 of the Turkish constitution provided for gender equality.

And although the legislative process could be slow, "a law adopted in 15 minutes can take 15 years before it is implemented and sometimes even 150 years before it becomes part of the cultural reality." "The greatest need is for social and cultural change", she stressed.

Fortunately, some change in social attitudes could be seen. For example, violence against women was fortunately "now seen as a huge social issue" and was widely discussed in the media.

"Women who have been victims of violence often remain silent"

"Women who have been victims of violence often remain silent" so there must be questions about any official statistics on this matter, according to Yakin Ertürk, UN special rapporteur on violence against women. She also said that UN social development indices showed that women's literacy rates, participation in political life and employment were unsatisfactory.

"Only 20% of women are in non-rural employment", which has a knock-on effect, since to get into politics women generally need to be in work first. Turkey has set up an Equal Opportunities Commission but she, like other speakers, regretted that it was not a gender equality body. She was also disappointed that the Turkish Parliament had not accepted the idea of positive discrimination in politics to promote the presence of women.

Yesim Arat of the University of Istanbul told the hearing that "only 9.1% of political representatives in Turkey are women". She believed quotas for candidates for election would be useful but stressed that for positive discrimination to be successful "attitudes must change".

She regretted that "the involvement of women in politics has not been a priority in Turkey in recent years".

Press release

Nebahat Akkoç, of KAMER, an NGO working for women's rights in eastern and south-eastern Anatolia, said there had been important developments in the Turkish penal code, for example on violence against women and gender discrimination, but her organisation was also working "to change the way violence against women is perceived socially", with some success: a few years ago 9 out of 10 people thought violence against women was acceptable, but now 9 out of 10 thought it was wrong. "This is a huge breakthrough in the public's mentality", she said. However, women's causes still had problems in accessing funding and were not supported by government. "If the public sector could work with women's organisations, much progress could be made", she stressed.

Political parties and women's rights

Gabriela Cretu (PES, RO) asked which Turkish political parties supported women's rights most. In reply, Yesim Arat pointed to the Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP), which has a quota for women and thus more elected women politicians than in "developed" regions of Turkey. Minister Nimet Çubukçu, by contrast, said that her own "conservative" party had a high proportion of women MPs in the national parliament. Above all she stressed the need for women to "agree on universal principles", such as the need to get into politics and to protest against violence.

Winding up the meeting, Emine Bozkurt argued that a great deal had been achieved already, for example on legislation, on combating violence against women and in setting up the Equal Opportunities Commission. However, much remained to be done, for example on education, further action against violence and helping women into the workplace. Earlier she had pointed out that Turkey must meet the Copenhagen criteria as part of its EU accession process and that "women's rights are part of human rights". In this connection, she said, the EU must urge Turkey "to be ambitious, to stay ambitious". Ultimately, "we owe this to the 35 million women in Turkey".

Contact :

Jack Blackwell

Press Service

E-mail: jack.blackwell@europarl.europa.eu

BXL: (32-2) 28 42929

PORT: (32) 498.983.400