



**European Committee
of the Regions**



**5th meeting of the
Commission for Sustainable Territorial Development
of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM)**

18 October 2018, 9.30 – 13.00 VMA 1

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**BACKGROUND NOTE FOR THE DEBATE ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN THE
MEDITERRANEAN – WHAT PLACE FOR WOMEN IN THE POLITICAL LIFE AT LOCAL LEVEL?**

The goal of this debate is to analyse the challenges women need to face to engage in an active political career in this area of the world and compare them with the situation within the EU, and maybe realise that the challenges do not differ so much from one side to the other of the Mediterranean. This is a concrete follow up of one of the recommendations of the ARLEM report on Women Empowerment adopted in Giza (Egypt) in 2018.

Several EU countries mark 100 years in 2019 since women were allowed to vote (Luxembourg and the Netherlands), since the first women were elected as MPs (Luxembourg and Austria), or held a ministerial position (Ireland). Nevertheless, women are still under-represented in European, national, and local politics although the number of them in decision-making posts has been growing over the past five years, thanks, in part, to EU-level measures on gender balance. There is no parliament in the EU that reserves seats for women, but legal quotas, party quotas, and "soft" quotas, such as recommendations and targets, are becoming increasingly used. The same applies for the countries at the shores of the Mediterranean. Worldwide, only 1 in 4 parliamentary seats are held by women.

Local and regional authorities have a crucial role to play and can be key actors in addressing gender equality, notably through their control over public services and expenditure. However, women remain significantly underrepresented in local decision-making across the EU.

According to the European Institute of Gender Equality, to date only 13% of elected mayors, 29% of members of regional parliaments and assemblies, and about 36% of members of regional governments are female. These data vary significantly both between and within member states. With less than 21% of CoR members being female, CoR membership remains significantly less gender balanced than the European Parliament (37% women) and regional parliaments (29%).

In the case of the Mediterranean, the situation varies also a lot between countries. While gender stereotypes, roles and expectations intimidate women's participation in political and public life in some countries, legislation and the absence of gender-sensitive policies are seen as one of the main challenges of gender mainstreaming and women's political participation. Despite so, women's participation in public life is an area where significant positive changes have occurred. However, even in countries with higher women representation in Parliament, such participation remains at 30% or less in most UfM countries. Female representation in senior positions in Government structures, advisory bodies, local authorities, and the judiciary remains limited. Quotas have been adopted by many countries, but they remain a contested issue with occasional preference for voluntary targets. One case to pay attention to is Tunisia. The UfM has identified this issue as one of the priorities of its works and held a Ministerial meeting on strengthening the role of women in society in November 2017 in Cairo (Egypt) where identified, among other four priorities, the need to strengthen women access to leadership positions in public and private sector.

As already suggested in many international studies and reports, the challenges facing women in relation to entry in politics can be summarise in the "Five C's":

- 1) Childcare: women are more likely to have this responsibility
- 2) Cash: women have less access to resources than men
- 3) Confidence: women are less likely to go forward for selection
- 4) Culture: a gendered culture is prevalent even within left-wing parties
- 5) Candidate Selection Procedures: the processes by which political parties select candidates has been identified as posing a significant obstacle to women's political participation

To solve these challenges, some potential initiatives that may encourage more women to consider a career in politics could be: Awareness Raising Campaigns; Supports for Women through Mentoring, Training and Networking; Voluntary Positive Action Measures (political party quotas); Mandatory Outcome Measures (reserved seat quotas); Mandatory Opportunity Measures (electoral gender quotas).

The panel will compare the experiences of leading women at the local / regional level of different countries on both sides of the Mediterranean: Tunisia, Germany, Morocco and Italy.

These countries are of particular interest: Tunisia is going through a full cycle of elections in a year (local, presidential, legislative and regional)! In this case, the invited Mayor Radhia BEN

HAJ SALAH, mayor of Zaout Kontech, is a clear example of the difficulties for women to carry out a political career in small cities and fighting against prejudices. Christiane OVERMANS is the City Councillor of Bonn and Vice President of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and of its German section. While Germany has a female head of government and the designate President of the next European Commission coming from this country also is a woman, there are actually not many leading female politicians such as mayors at city or regional level. Mina BOUHDOUD, Mayor of Lagfifat and Vice President of the Moroccan Association of Presidents of Municipal Councils (AMPCC) is also an advocate of women rights in Morocco and will explain us what are the main challenges for Moroccan women to enter in politics. Finally, Manuela BORA, a young Italian politician, regional minister of Marche region for Europe, industry, trade, internationalization, green economy, development, and equal opportunities since June 2015. She has made of gender equality a top priority of her mandate.

To moderate this panel we count with by Simone SUSSKIND, founder of Actions in the Mediterranean, an association aiming at promoting and developing cooperation between women from the Southern Mediterranean and European women and supporting dialogue and conflict resolution between women.

Some questions to discuss are:

- How would you describe the situation of women as local and regional politicians in your country?
- What challenges do women face specifically there, would you see the situation as improving or deteriorating?
- What progress has been made (if any) and what should happen next?
- What helped you personally in your career as a female local politician and how could we ensure there is more of this around?
- What is your message to women potentially interested in a political career; and to male local and regional politicians to help in the process?
- How could ARLEM help?