

Madi Sharma

The Macbeth effect

Uniwersyteckie Czasopismo Socjologiczne nr 11, 62-67

2015

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Madi Sharma
President of EESC Committee On European Instruments for Human Rights and Democracy
MADI Group

THE MACBETH EFFECT

ABSTRAKT

W poniższym artykule został opisany problem nierównego reprezentowania kobiet i mężczyzn w ciele doradczym Parlamentu Europejskiego jakim jest Europejski Komitet Ekonomiczno-Społeczny. Autorka zwraca uwagę, na fakt, że działania tej instytucji nie są w pełni wiarygodne, jeśli nie uwzględniają odpowiednich proporcji płci reprezentantów poszczególnych państw Unii Europejskiej i grup społecznych. Kobiety stanowiące ponad 51% społeczeństwa powinny mieć równie silną reprezentację, inaczej głos większości staje się głosem mniejszości.

Słowa kluczowe: EKES, kobiety, mężczyźni, równość płci, zrównoważony rozwój, demokracja

ABSTRACT

This article is about gender equality in the process of decision making at the EESC, which is an advisory body of the European Parliament. As the embodiment of civil society in Europe, the role of the EESC is to promote participatory democracy and the values upon which European integration is founded. But women are rarely members of EESC. In fact women represent 51% of society, if they do not have an equal representation - in effect the majority is being turned into the minority. If we accept that democracy is a mere concept and not reality, then we do not have gender balance in the decision-making process, which leads to policies being set by men for men. Gender equality is a fundamental right and a common value in the EU.

The following is a unique compilation of views, articles and opinion expressed by Madi Sharma in her work as an entrepreneur, a member of the European Economic and Social Committee and a freelance journalist.

Keywords: EESC, women, men, gender equality, sustainable growth, democracy

Any fan of Shakespeare knows that one should never mention the word "Macbeth" in a theatre – it might bring bad luck. Well, that is how I feel every time I mention the words "Woman", "Female" or "Gender". And I never, ever dare mention the word Feminist - it is like a curse! So, now I am facing a double challenge: I want to share some thoughts on economic, social and cultural sustainable growth, but how can I do it without mentioning women's contribution to achieve those goals?

The role of women in society is an essential part of the human potential which we chose to ignore, but which we need to tap. This is not just critical for any specific society, but it is paramount for them all. The solutions for the problems this planet faces will not come from politicians but from people.

If we choose to ignore that women represent 51% of society, we are in effect turning the majority into the minority. If we accept that democracy is a mere concept and not reality, then we do not have gender balance in the decision-making process, which leads to policies being set by men for men. Gender equality is a fundamental right and a common value in the EU. Human

rights are built on a foundation of economic, social and cultural rights. It is these rights that give us a stable and participatory democracy.

An EU Test for Democracy

Neither the EU Commission nor the EU Parliament, indeed no EU institution or body, has gender balance amongst its members. The EU shows no real commitment beyond its lip service that it is serious about equal representation of men and women in the decision-making process. The appointment of the new Commissioners in October 2015 was a great test for President Juncker to demonstrate the credentials of a gender conscious Europe: one that places women at the same level as men; one which recognises that women should be included in equal terms in the decision-making processes. However, only nine out of twenty eight Commissioners appointed are women. This is a blow to the concept of democratic governance and to the gender equality agenda of the European Union.

What is even more disappointing is the excuse used to explain the lack of women being appointed in the EU leadership, more specifically that 'there are not enough women qualified out there!' This is an unfounded argument since women are active today in all sectors of the economy and across all social and environmental dimensions. The barriers are not that there is a lack of qualified women but rather that there is a lack of equal opportunities given to them.

Gender equality is one of the EU's founding objectives, enshrined in its Treaties [Article 3(3) TEU] and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights [Article 23]. Under Article 8 TFEU, the Union must aim to eliminate inequalities and promote equality. The EU's right to act on issues of gender equality in employment and occupation stems from Article 157(3) TFEU.

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the EU advisory body which represents organized civil society and of which I am a member from the UK, currently has 353 Members drawn from economic, social and various interest groups in Europe. The EESC is relatively unknown amongst the general public. Consultation of the EESC by the Commission or the Council is mandatory in certain cases of legislation and optional in others. The EESC may also adopt opinions on its own initiative. On average, the EESC delivers 170 advisory opinions a year with a budget of 130 Million EUR. It thus has a key role to play in the Union's decision-making process.

As the embodiment of civil society in Europe, the role of the EESC is to promote participatory democracy and the values upon which European integration is founded. Nevertheless, the current proportion of female members is less than 23%! Additionally, the EESC has a sub-committee called Consultative Commission for Industrial Change (CCMI) of which the proportion of women is even less. Indeed, if the "House of Civil Society" cannot represent women equally then its own legitimacy should be questioned.

Women in Society

Over the half (51%) of the EU population are female. Many are highly educated and skilled, and are thus an important part of the workforce. Female students outnumber their male counterparts at tertiary education level, resulting in 50% more highly qualified women than men available in the labour market. The Davies report¹ identified a gap in the UK workforce which could be

¹https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/31480/11-745-women-on-boards.pdf. [16.07.2015]

compensated for by the recruitment of 2 million qualified workers over the next 10 years, most of which would need to be highly qualified women. Moreover, female economic participation has far-reaching financial and social benefits for countries. The Global Gender Gap Index for 2011² demonstrated that countries with higher gender equality had a higher GDP per capita.

The drive for change is based on strong evidence that there is a supply of highly skilled women across Member States and therefore any argument for gender balance should be based on the 'merit and preference rule' rather than on positive discrimination. Nevertheless, there are still factors that hinder women from taking the lead, such as a lack of reconciliation measures between business and family life, limited access to networks that are important for higher positions, lack of self-confidence, etc.

As well as being a precondition for true democracy and an equitable society, women's participation in society on equal footing is an essential condition for the achievement of the EU objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. World Bank and Transparency International research shows that transparency increases and corruption decreases where women are well represented in decision-making and management bodies. Good governance in all walks of life is good for society.

The expansion in global economies is a direct result of human capacity. Women are drivers for geopolitical change impacting on health, education, social welfare, the environment and economic productivity. This creates a strong business case for women in companies' boardrooms. Gender diversity is not only an asset for the corporate image but also because it tightens the links between the company, employees, shareholders and customers. Although diversity is recognised as a fundamental aspect of all private sector CSR policies because of its value, it has yet to be put into practice in many companies.

Quotas, however uncomfortable, provide an effective means to promote women into board positions, as stressed by Laurence Parisot, President of MEDEF, during a speech at an EESC Plenary in 2012: "*Quotas should not be needed – but they are the only way to break men's prejudices towards women's incompetence*". Today, just 13.7% of board members are women, which is evidence of clear discrimination.

Women in the Economy

Against the background of the financial crisis in Europe, austerity became the key word in finding a way out of the crisis. Only recently was talk of austerity complemented by talk on investment. Policies to promote growth must be the key focus. In a globally changing landscape characterised by uncertainty, continuous change and much greater global competition, recognising the role of entrepreneurs in channelling such investment for economic recovery is one of the key elements of ensuring a competitive and dynamic European economy. Therefore, we cannot continue to dismiss the multi-billion euro opportunity offered by women to the economy. Growth in the economy results in greater social equity, improved and inclusive development, access to enriched cultural engagement and long-term environmental sustainability.

Over 51% of the EU's population is female, with women accounting for 45% of employment and women providing the driving force behind more than 70% of purchasing decisions. "Today it is clear that women and men cannot be discriminated against on the grounds of gender" BUT the fact is 96.8% of companies' chairmen are men.

²http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2011.pdf. [16.07.2015]

Women-owned businesses are critical for the health of the European economy. For more than a decade, governments and a range of organisations in the public, private and academic sectors have recognised the value of supporting women's enterprise from both a policy and practical perspective. The result has been increased awareness of the contribution these businesses make to the economy. Despite encouraging progress, the EU still needs to take further significant measures to release the full potential of enterprises and especially SMEs owned by women. Women are too often invisible in the business arena – in the media, within business representative organisations, and when it comes to influencing policy.

There is a continuing gender gap in terms of entrepreneurship, which translates into fewer women entrepreneurs. Today women entrepreneurs in Europe make up only 30% of all entrepreneurs. This adds to the unexploited potential for economic growth. Women-owned businesses operate across every sector, and their role in growing the economy, and creating and sustaining new jobs is crucial to recovery and growth. Research shows that women-owned businesses invest more in training for staff than employers in general, and that around two-thirds are aiming to increase the leadership capability of their managers. So, investing to support growth-oriented women owned businesses is likely to have a greater return than on investing in businesses in general. Most statistics give conservative forecasts, but there is significant research evidence indicating stronger growth aspirations among female entrepreneurs, including those who are mothers. Research undertaken by Natwest Bank in the UK found that 88% of women, compared with 74% of men, were predicting growth in their businesses. The growth predicted averaged 25%.

Most worrying is that, at a time when government funding for business support has been cut in many countries, and when many businesses are struggling to survive and grow, policies to support women owned business have fallen off the agenda, despite the laudable words. Women-owned businesses are a "multi-billion Euro opportunity" which must be recognised, not dismissed. One of the biggest challenges in quantifying women's enterprises in Europe is the lack of data, both quantitative and qualitative. Business registers and many sources of government statistics (including VAT registration) are not gender-disaggregated. Similarly, information on female owned business is not readily obtainable from sources as banks or business support organisations.

Gender Equality Duty

Gender mainstreaming policies, including legislation, are in place across Europe but do not include a focus on ensuring an analysis of the allocation of resources and funds by gender. To deliver transparency, accountability and due diligence in terms of proof of genuine gender equality compliance such analysis needs to be provided. This is a legal requirement in the UK under the terms of "Gender Equality Duty", which requires all public authorities, carrying out all their functions, to have due regard:

- to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment on the grounds of sex;
- to promote equality of opportunity between women and men.

This should require an analysis of allocation of resources and funds to prove gender neutrality.

The Gender Equality Duty concept is important for ensuring gender equality through responsibility and through assessment of the allocation of resources and collection of disaggregated data from a gender perspective. This would support policy makers in assessing the

true impact of women in society, and especially in the economy. (Example: the regional development (ERDF) or social (ESF) funds: the EU allocates funds to Member States, which reallocate them to the regional level. Often those funds are used to create jobs by creating enterprises, but at no point is the question of gender raised). To ensure gender equality transparency, each level of policy makers should question and analyse, by gender, how the money is distributed.

Gender can be a "lens" through which other inequalities (race, disability or age) can be understood and acted upon. For gender mainstreaming to be effective across Europe there needs to be an integrated approach, particularly as highlighted in a recent OECD report³ under the motto "*Tackle gender gap to boost growth*". A focus on gender covers all aspects of equality and affects everyone, men and women. A focus on gender recognises that inequalities between women and men result from unfairness or stereotyping, which affects everyone.

A gender analysis is needed to avoid wasted resources in education and training, higher levels of ill-health, and economic costs to businesses where women's skills are not valued and their potential and talents unrecognised. Furthermore, support for career guidance, overcoming stereotypes and breaking the glass ceiling is essential to empower women of all ages. Female role models and leaders also need to be more prominently featured in the media to promote the positive changes women bring to the economy and the society.

Women as Drivers of Change

Women can be equally included in society and decision-making levels if the following measures are respected:

- Including men in the debate and in communication strategies;
- Collecting data and produce annual policy and research updates across European regions, increasing access to gender-disaggregated data across government departments and agencies.
- Giving greater visibility of women in senior roles – profiling women that have achieved positions in the decision-making process across Member States, raising awareness of these women in the wider business and social community and demonstrating the impact of diversity on sustainability, employment and growth.
- Achieving greater transparency in the recruitment process, from raising awareness of opportunities through to the application and interviewing processes, in order to attract the broadest range of talent from all talented and competent individuals.
- Building and retaining a critical mass of diversity. This means ensuring that a minimum 33% of any gender is present in any decision-making body to ensure true diversity.
- Challenging stereotypes around gendered roles. A lot of progress has been made regarding domestic roles, which are real barriers to female economic participation, but it is essential that stereotypes are removed in all sectors, especially in the media and in politics.
- Creating a talent pipeline. The sustained benefit of diversity in the decision-making process requires a steady stream of highly-qualified individuals who have both the aspiration and the capacity to take on such positions. It is imperative to create an

³<http://www.oecd.org/social/family/50423364.pdf>. [dostep: 16.07.2015]

environment that enables women to navigate their way through their careers and achieve the roles they seek to obtain. A strong pipeline will emerge from conditions such as: the presence of female role models, more transparent recruitment processes and clear leadership succession planning. All of them provide the foundations for gender diversity in the EU.

- Creating a European-wide coordinated database with details of women who are qualified for positions. This would address concerns regarding the invisibility of women who are eligible for positions. The database would further reduce the risk of a small minority of women being recruited into multiple positions. A European-wide database would support the argument for cross fertilisation of skills and experience across Member States along with opportunities to work across different sectors.

The barriers to achieving gender equality in decision-making are far stronger than well-rehearsed arguments on gender assumptions. Little will ever be achieved without the willingness of both men and women to take positive action to move beyond words and respect each other's views. Europe's strength is its "unity in diversity", but diversity must be harnessed first.

Back to Macbeth

You will have noticed that I omitted the hot topics such as: gender-based and domestic violence, the gender pay-gap, the maternity leave directive, child care policies, work-life balance... the list goes on. These are all serious related issues, to be developed in another text.

I am unsure which witch I am supposed to be, but, like most women, I do not seek power or control, I have no prophecies and definitely do not seek a world ran by women! I do seek justice and a world which recognises that women deserve to be treated equally to men, in spite of all the differences. Most importantly, I have a vision of a world which is sustainable and values the contribution of all human beings, women included.

Ghandi says: "You must be the change you want to see".

Madi adds: "You must be the change you want to see – No Excuses".

Bibliography

<http://www.oecd.org/social/family/50423364.pdf>.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/31480/11-745-women-on-boards.pdf.

http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2011.pdf.