



European elections 2024: for a feminist Europe!

Women's rights as a block and spearhead of European democracy

Citizens of Europe will vote from June 6 to 9, 2024. Gender equality and women's rights represent **a constitutive value of the European Union**¹. It must stand as a block against the regression of rights, and, above all, **continue to promote gender equality in all European policies and programs.**

If major advances in the promotion of women in positions of responsibility and the fight against violence towards women have been observed over the last five years, the current international context of decline of democracies in favor of authoritarian regimes, as well as the proliferation of conflicts and war violence, are undermining human rights, and, first and foremost the rights of women. These threats must encourage democratic governments to seize equality as the **spearhead for an inclusive, fair and ambitious Europe.**

The French "**Haut Conseil à l'Égalité entre les femmes et les hommes**"(HCE) calls for a wide mobilization, on the eve of crucial European elections. We want action on two levels: on one hand an ambitious project which aims to guarantee "the best of Europe for women", on the other hand, a consolidation of the institutional infrastructure for promoting equality and women's rights in the Brussels institutions to ward off any regression and pursue the progress that is, still sadly necessary.

- **Carry out an ambitious project: guarantee the best of Europe for women**

The HCE supports the clause of the most favored European², initiated by Gisèle Halimi and the association "Choisir la Cause des femmes", allowing each European to enjoy the most favorable rights and legislations of the Member States.

¹ Andrea Peto and Ian Manners, The European Union and the Value of Gender equality, 2008

² New updated edition of The Clause of the most favored European. Choose the cause of women. Editions des Femmes (11/16/2023).

Among the best practices, **France** has just included the right to **abortion in its Constitution**, a world premiere. France calls for its integration into the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, like all sexual and reproductive rights. **Spain** is leading the way, being the most favorable in legal measures for women's rights, particularly in its comprehensive policy to end/ **domestic violence and sexual violence** (more than 200 million euros per year devoted to this large-scale legislative arsenal) as well as its provisions relating to marriage and divorce. **Sweden is at the forefront** on abortion accessibility, the fight against forced sterilizations, taxation of couples, parental leave and pensions.

Many other countries can be held up as examples for certain provisions. **Croatia** recognizes the status of civilian victims of sexual violence and rape in times of war, compensates, and supports those victims. **Germany** has imposed the criminalization of incest on children and adults. On sexual and reproductive rights, **Estonia** has adopted the best system of emotional, relational and sexual health education, compulsory throughout schooling starting primary school. Teachers receive specific training to carry out monitored and structured programs. Finally, regarding families, **Denmark** has put in place the best system of childcare structures, provided by municipalities, free for the most deprived, and accessible from the age of six months, allowing mothers not to be cut off from the world of work.

All these laws and good practices brought together in a **European legislative package** would make it possible to truly advance women's rights in the European Union and well beyond!

- **Consolidate the place of women in European governance**

In order for equality challenges and women's rights to be defended, it is essential that the EU establishes parity in its institutions so that women can participate equally in decision-making. The "Haut Conseil à l'Égalité" wishes to see the following priorities implemented in each of the four Brussels institutions:

1) In the **European Parliament (EP)**:

- **Ensure effective parity** in the next legislature, at all levels of political responsibility, particularly in the committees
- **Grant a full status** to the Committee of women's rights and gender equality (FEMM)
- Formalize an **inter-party feminist organization** to ensure the integration of equality in all the work of the Parliament

2) In the **Council of Ministers**: create a **specific body on equality and rights of women at ministerial level** so that the questions related to equality are debated and negotiated between ministers responsible for the subject.

3) At the **Commission**: ensure gender parity in the college of Commissioners, maintain the position of commissioner for equality, an equality taskforce at the General Secretariat and a reinforced network of high-level coordinators.

In all instances, gender mainstreaming imposed by the European treaties must become a reality, particularly in the following areas:

- **Budget:** include equality objectives, ensure their respect for granting European funding and implementing gender-sensitive annual budgets in the financial perspectives 2028-2033

- **Ecology:** assess the specific impact initiatives aimed at environmental protection and adaptation to climate change (notably the Common Agriculture Policy and the Green Deal) have on women

- **Technology:** ensure a better representation of women in activities to regulate and promote technological advances, including artificial intelligence

- **Economy:** measuring the impacts of economic and trade policies on women's rights

- **Migration** policy: welcoming refugees and guaranteeing the asylum rights to women victims of persecution and violence because of their gender and their membership in a social group.³

4) To the **European External Action Service (EEAS):** adopt a **European feminist foreign policy** (feminist diplomacy), by strengthening solidarity with civil society organizations and women rights defenders and by establishing non-discrimination against women and sexual orientation as a precondition for any negotiation with third countries; in increasing funding dedicated to strengthening equality in all EU external policies; by achieving parity at the decision making levels of European diplomacy and implementing the Women, Peace and Security agenda in the European security and defense policy.

The European election is an opportunity to raise awareness among all candidates for gender equality issues. The HCE expects the next legislature to witness **major advances to concretely improve the life of European women.**

³ The European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled in Case C-621/21 that women collectively constitute a particular "social group" under EU Directive 2011/95, submitted to structural gender based violence,