

**PRESS RELEASE:**

**Women's Political Participation in Malta**

Advancing gender equality in elected office in Malta was the focus of a Conference that brought together representatives from political parties, Members of Parliament, policy-makers and academics, as well as representatives from civil society and the media. This Conference was organised by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), in partnership with the House of Representatives, the Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) and the National Council of Women. Experts from Malta, UK, Sweden and Czech Republic also shared experiences and good practices from their own countries.

The participation of women in Maltese politics was highlighted by the Speaker of the House of Representatives Dr Anglu Farrugia in his welcome and opening remarks. Dr Farrugia referred to gender-sensitive Parliaments, whose structures, operations, methods and work respond to the needs and interest of both men and women, and are thus central to good parliamentary governance.

“Women’s meaningful participation in all spheres in society, including leadership and politics, is essential to building and sustaining democracy”, emphasised Minister for Social Dialogue Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties, Hon Dr Helena Dalli while concluding this Conference. Yet women still have a way to go towards equal representation in positions of power and leadership, whether in corporate boardrooms or in parliamentary and presidential cabinets, reiterated Minister Dalli. The government initiatives that are being taken to encourage more women to take up leadership positions were outlined by Minister Dalli.

The various obstacles as to why women are underrepresented in the political and public sphere and the initiatives that are being taken by NCPE to empower more women to participate in decision-making positions were outlined by the Commissioner for the Promotion of Equality, Ms Renee Laiviera. A mentoring programme is being finalised to provide women aspiring to hold decision-making positions with the opportunity to be mentored by persons who occupy high-level posts. In order to give visibility to professional women and their competences in various fields, work is also underway on a Directory of Professional Women. Moreover, two research studies are also in hand – one on the gender-balanced representation in decision making in various fields and another on gender quotas and related measures.

Meanwhile, the Deputy Head of the ODIHR Democratisation Department, Dr Nathalie Tagwerker, called on Maltese stakeholders to explore ways for advancing women’s political participation in Malta, by considering special legal measures, facilitating women’s access to political parties and actively recruiting women for political and public office at all levels. Hon. Meg Munn, Member of Parliament and Representative of the Labour Cooperative UK, stated that networks matter in political life.

*A Paper on Women and Political Participation in Malta – the way forward* was presented by Dr JosAnn Cutajar, Director of University of Malta Cottonera Resource Centre and Senior Lecturer at the Gender Studies Department. A number of conditions are needed for female



candidates to be elected, namely that they need to be recruited by a political party; have substantial campaign resources; have political acumen and media exposure as well as the need for powerful mentors from within the party and party backing. The political party elites need to be more convincing where gender equality, democracy and justice are concerned, emphasised Dr Cutajar.

Throughout this Conference, three panels discussed good practices and strategies for increasing the participation of women in politics; the role of political parties in promoting women's political participation in the upcoming elections and the role of civil society and the media in advocating for increased women's political participation. The panels were moderated by Prof. Godfrey Pirotta, Dr Carmen Sammut and Prof. Mark Anthony Falzon.

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