



**Convention on the Elimination
of All Forms of Discrimination
against Women**

Distr.: General
1 February 2007

Original: English

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**
Thirty-seventh session

Summary record of the 768th meeting (Chamber A)

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 24 January 2007, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Gabr (Vice-Chairperson)

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In the absence of Ms. Šimonović, Ms. Gabr, Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (continued)

Sixth periodic report of Greece (continued)
(CEDAW/C/GRC/6; CEDAW/C/GRC/Q/6 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Greece took places at the Committee table.*

Articles 7 to 9 (continued)

2. **Ms. Shin**, noting that the tables of figures showing manpower numbers in the armed forces did not appear to include any women, asked whether women were allowed to join the forces.

3. Noting that the Government had provided 5 million euro for non-governmental organizations, for the next two years, she asked whether women's NGOs had received a fair share of that amount.

4. Turning to the matter of organizations in which both men and women were members — for example, trade unions — she asked whether they enjoyed the same rights as men to leadership positions.

5. **Mr. Flinterman** expressed surprise that no quota had yet been set with regard to the parliamentary elections, and wondered whether the Council of State had been requested to give a ruling on whether establishment of quotas for elections was compatible with the Constitution.

6. **Ms. Tsoumani** (Greece), while conceding that women's participation in political decision-making, in parliament and in government was rather low, said that the Municipal and Community Code did provide for a one-third quota in favour of women. There had been a quite remarkable increase in the number of female mayors elected, but data on the overall numbers of women were not yet available. There were many reasons for women's relatively low political participation including stereotypes, difficulties in reconciling work and family and lack of communication skills and resources necessary for a political campaign.

7. With a view to rectifying the situation, the Government had begun creating training programmes for women, and had produced a manual on communication skills for women in politics. It was also trying to combat stereotypes in the mass media and in education and had set up a prize to be awarded annually to a journalist whose work encouraged gender equality.

8. **Ms. Yannakourou** (Greece), taking up the question of penalties for failure to observe the one-third quota for women, said that one law stated that the personnel of administrative bodies in the public sector had to comprise at least one-third women. If that was not the case, then decisions made by such a body could be annulled by the courts. With respect to the law relating to municipal and prefectural elections: if women did not account for at least one third of the candidates, then the list of candidates was not legally valid.

9. With regard to organizations whose membership included both men and women, she said that, since the Greek legal system recognized the principle of liberty of association, the State could not intervene directly in the way that a non-governmental organization chose to structure its leadership. It could only urge such associations to advance more women to higher positions. The law did, however, explicitly prohibit gender discrimination within unions and employers' organizations. In practice, there were not many women in leadership positions, the reason, as always, being stereotypes about women's role.

10. Military service was mandatory for men, but women were not called to serve. There were, however, professional military careers open to women in certain specific activities.

11. Finally, she said that the Council of State had already been asked to rule on the constitutionality of the law stipulating a one-third quota for women in the municipal and prefectural elections, and had found the law to be constitutional. There was thus no constitutional obstacle to the establishment of quotas in other types of election.

12. **Ms. Yannakou** (Greece) agreed that women were underrepresented in the diplomatic service, in part because they had not been admitted to the diplomatic service until 1968. At the ambassadorial level there were 252 men and only 14 women. The situation had improved over the past 10 years and, among Third

Secretaries, there were 19 men and 25 women. There was no discrimination with regard to promotion.

13. **Mr. Moskoff**, referring to Ms. Shin's question, said that the figure of 5 million euro cited earlier related specifically to projects run by non-governmental organizations to combat human trafficking. The funds were spent on shelters, legal aid, training of police officers, and so on. Additionally, a large portion was spent on development cooperation abroad, in an attempt to eliminate the root causes of trafficking in its source countries. The NGOs in question worked primarily in the spheres of human rights and migration, as well as specifically on gender issues.

Articles 10 to 14

14. **Mr. Flinterman** requested information about the life-long education programmes, in particular, data regarding the percentage of women in them. Although the report did point out that the programmes addressed vulnerable groups such as the Roma, Muslims and prisoners, he would be interested in knowing whether Muslim women, as well as Muslim men, participated in those programmes, how successful minority women were and whether students received some sort of formal certification upon completion of their studies.

15. Finally, although the responses to the list of issues and questions (CEDAW/C/GRC/Q/6/Add.1) advanced a number of reasons (in paragraph 10) for the small number of women teaching at the tertiary level, it did not say anything about what the Government was doing to increase their numbers.

16. **Ms. Pimentel**, referring to paragraph 25 of the responses to the list of issues and questions, asked how many women used family planning services and private clinics, respectively, why the former were underutilized and whether the Government had taken any steps to address the situation. She also enquired about the measures taken to prevent and treat cancers of the reproductive organs, and requested statistics on the number of female drug addicts.

17. **Ms. Simms** asked whether women from minority groups had access to health-care services and how they obtained information about diseases such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. Since approximately 10 per cent of its population did not speak Greek, the State party should indicate whether medical facilities offered interpretation services with a view to ensuring that

women could discuss their health concerns in their native language.

18. Noting the high number of Caesarean sections performed in Greece, she wondered whether doctors were encouraging women to undergo these procedures — as was often the case — or whether Greek women viewed childbirth as an unpleasant experience.

19. **Ms. Dairiam** expressed concern about the abortion rate in Greece, which, according to her sources, stood at around 25 per cent. Given the low incidence of contraceptive use, she wondered whether abortion was being used as a method of contraception. It was vital to collect data on women's reproductive health in order to address those issues.

20. Efforts should be made to ascertain whether doctors were pressuring women to choose Caesarean-section births, which, in some countries, were extremely profitable for the medical establishment. She enquired whether the State party had established a medical regulatory authority and, if so, whether women could refer complaints directly to it. She also wished to know whether medical professionals were bound by a specific code of ethics.

21. She asked how many women from minority groups had access to pre-and post-natal care, emergency obstetric treatment and assisted childbirth, and requested further information on the number of such women who underwent gynaecological examinations. In closing, she stressed that, under article 2 of the Convention, the State party had a responsibility to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization or enterprise, including private medical facilities if necessary.

22. **Ms. Katsaridou** (Greece) said that, in the context of efforts to promote a culture of life-long learning, a series of programmes had been launched to assist people from all backgrounds to improve their skills in various areas. The Second Chance Schools and Parent Schools mentioned in the report were just two examples of those programmes. Further information, including statistics, could be provided upon request.

23. The Government had considered introducing quotas to increase the number of women occupying posts in higher education establishments, but concerns remained over the constitutionality of such a measure. However, the selection process for candidates was

transparent and democratic, offering equal opportunities for women and men. With a view to eliminating stereotypes, university students were encouraged to incorporate a gender perspective into their studies and to embark upon research in relevant areas.

24. **Ms. Alexopoulou** (Greece) said that, during the 2005-2006 academic year, a considerable number of Roma women had attended the various courses run by the General Secretariat for Adult Education. Indeed, around 90 per cent of the students enrolled in the four classes specifically designed for the Roma population had been women.

25. **Ms. Tsoumani** (Greece) agreed that the Government did not have enough information about women's access to health-care services. Although a general medical code had been promulgated, it did not place particular emphasis on women's rights.

26. Health education was an integral part of the school curriculum, and a panel of experts had been established to develop relevant teaching materials, coordinate activities and train teachers. Gender relations and sex education accounted for 20 per cent of the health education course, and information on contraceptive use and other related issues was provided by the Greek Association of Family Planning and the Ministry of Health and Welfare.

27. **Ms. Katsaridou** (Greece) said that the Research Centre for Gender Equality had initiated a study on diseases affecting women. In order to raise women's awareness of health-related issues, around €1.2 million had been allocated to various publicity campaigns.

28. **Ms. Alexopoulou** (Greece) said that the Ministry of Health and Welfare had implemented a number of programmes designed specifically for Roma women. Medical centres had been established in Roma settlements, and a decentralized network of social services had been created. In addition, mobile units offered preventive health-care services, such as breast examinations, pap smears and vaccinations.

29. **Ms. Shin** asked whether the Labour Inspectorate was responsible for enforcing the new law on gender equality, and whether women who were victims of sexual harassment had to file a complaint with the Inspectorate or whether it did its own independent inspections. She also wished to know how many cases had been brought to court since the introduction of the

law and whether minority women were aware of its existence.

30. Turning to childcare, she acknowledged that efforts had been made to improve services in day-care centres, but wondered what percentage of the needs were actually met. The law granting fathers the right to parental leave only if the mother did not make use of it further reinforced stereotypes; parental leave should be equally available to fathers and mothers. Finally, she wished to see more data showing how the increased quotas for part-time work and training benefited all categories of women.

31. **Ms. Saiga** enquired about the length of parental leave and whether it applied equally to fathers and mothers. In the light of a previous response indicating that in case of the birth of a third child employees were granted a three-month paid childcare leave, she wondered whether it would not have been more reasonable if that measure applied to any birth. She asked how the leave payment was calculated and whether any data were available indicating how many fathers had exercised their right to parental leave.

32. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, reiterated her concerns about the lack of clarity on the situation of women's employment and sexual harassment and what instruments were available to allow women to counter discrimination without fear of losing their jobs. She wished to know what services were available to rural women in the areas of health and education and how they compared with those available in urban areas. Considering that women were migrating away from rural areas and that elderly women were being left alone in remote mountain areas, she asked what was being done to address their needs and what impact such migration was having on tourism in rural areas. Finally, she wondered whether there were any figures available concerning poverty in rural communities.

33. **Ms. Tsoumani** (Greece), replying to questions on article 11, stressed that the Government considered women's employment an important factor of development, competitiveness and social cohesion. The elimination of sexual discrimination and harassment against women was a national priority and the Government ensured that qualitative and quantitative targets for female employment were included in the national reform plan.

34. **Ms. Yannakourou** (Greece), replying to the question posed by Ms. Shin, said that, under the new law, women who were victims of discrimination or sexual harassment could seek redress either individually or through an intermediary such as an NGO or a trade union by filing a complaint with the Ombudsman or the Labour Inspectorate. Two sexual harassment cases had been brought before the courts thus far, but no rulings had, as yet, been handed down.

35. With regard to public awareness, she noted that there had been considerable debate about the law prior to its enactment. Moreover, the Government was launching an information campaign aimed at women in the public and private sectors and the Research Centre for Gender Equality was preparing an information guide to help explain the law to women refugees, immigrants and victims of human trafficking. With regard to childcare, she said that only 50 per cent of the needs were being met through the existing structures; however, a new project was being prepared that would strengthen the day-care system and allow men and women to reconcile their professional and personal lives.

36. Turning to the issue of parental leave, she explained that there were differences between the private and the public sectors. In the private sector, it was part of collective bargaining agreements and could be taken by either parent in the form of reduced working time for 30 months after the birth of the child or an equivalent leave of absence. Parental leave could be granted to the father only if the mother did not make use of it; all employees were also entitled to three-and-a-half-month unpaid leave of absence before the child reached three and a half years of age.

37. In the public sector, the mother or the father was entitled to unpaid leave of absence for up to two years until the child reached six years of age. Under a bill that was before Parliament, the right which used to be granted exclusively to mothers to reduce their working day by two hours until the child was two years old and by one hour until the child reached four years of age was being extended to fathers as well.

38. Finally, in response to the question posed by Ms. Gabr, she said that the new law on sexual harassment prohibited the termination of work contracts and other unfavourable treatment based on gender or family in both the public and private sectors. If an employer dismissed an employee because she was

unyielding to sexual advances or gave testimony in court, the victim could seek damages in court or ask to return to her job or seek compensation for moral prejudice.

39. **Ms. Tsoumani** (Greece), in response to the question from Ms. Shin, said that the goal of the childcare policy was not just to increase childcare facilities, but also to find alternative ways of providing direct funding to women to help them improve their employability.

40. **Ms. Katsaridou** (Greece) added, with regard to the education of agricultural female workers in remote areas and the islands, that training was being provided through various projects and specialized classes run by the Ministry of Education and the organization responsible for training and employment. These women were being helped to start their own businesses. Many women were active in agro-tourism. As for the elderly men and women in remote mountain areas, they had not been abandoned because representatives of the national health system visited them at least three times a week to try to address their needs.

Articles 15 and 16

41. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** noted that information had reached the Committee that suggested that the Government was not fully implementing its obligations under article 16, in particular with regard to minority women and family law. The report gave very little information regarding article 16, although the responses had a small section on those matters. Members of the Muslim minority in the Thrace area were, apparently, allowed to choose whether to be governed in family matters by Muslim religious law or by Greek civil law. Since the sharia or religious law was known to be very traditional and patriarchal and quite unprotective of the rights of women as understood in the Convention, to which Greece had subscribed without reservation, she asked what was being done to ensure protection of Muslim women's rights in accordance with the Convention. She also asked for information on the law governing the distribution of property in divorce cases, particularly in informal associations such as cohabitations, and on the definition of marital property, which ought to include intangible property such as pension rights, severance pay rights and so forth.

42. **Ms. Coker-Appiah** agreed with Ms. Halperin-Kaddari that the report should give more information on article 16 concerns, since it was often within the family that women suffered the greatest discrimination. She also said that respect for traditional rights and practices of minorities must not serve as an excuse for not intervening to protect women's rights.

43. **Mr. Kastanas** (Greece) agreed that respect for traditions could not justify the lowering of standards with respect to human rights. Greece did not have parallel or separate legal orders. The civil code was binding on all citizens. The Government allowed minorities to choose traditional legal systems in family and inheritance matters, but only when the outcomes did not contradict fundamental Greek values and the Greek constitutional order and laws. Various practices allowed under Muslim religious law, such as polygamy, underage marriage, marriage by proxy and repudiation of a spouse, were forbidden under Greek law. The problem was complex and was being discussed in various academic and civil society forums.

44. **Ms. Yannakourou** (Greece) said that details of the law governing relations between men and women in marriage had been given in the previous report. Citing a few of the provisions of that law, she said that each spouse kept his or her surname in the marriage and children were given surnames by the joint choice of the parents; the age of consent for marriage was 18 for both sexes and the spouses jointly chose the property regime they wished to live by.

45. **Ms. Katsaridou** (Greece) said that the education of minorities, particularly the Muslim minority in Thrace, was a priority matter for the Government. Much was being done to promote adaptation and social integration of minorities through education and training. Training centres had been established where young people and adults could improve their technical and Greek language skills. Steps had been taken to improve school attendance and reduce the number of dropouts. Quotas had also been established to guarantee places for minority students in institutions of higher learning.

46. **Ms. Neubauer** said that the issue of the representation of women at higher levels and in decision-making bodies was often neglected. The Government should strengthen its monitoring of compliance in that area, so as to show how seriously it took its obligations under the Convention. The same

applied to the need to change the male-dominated composition of Parliament. One approach would be to get political parties to welcome women at higher levels within their structures.

47. **Ms. Shin** stressed the role of trade unions, employers organizations and non-governmental organizations in protecting the rights of women workers. Although the Government could not force organizations and enterprises to accept equal participation by women, it could offer financial and other incentives to get such policies accepted.

48. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** reiterated her questions about the definition of marital property and the protection of the rights of women in voluntary unions such as cohabitation.

49. **Ms. Coker-Appiah** requested information on the status of children born in Greece of immigrant parents. The Committee had heard that more than 200,000 such children had been denied birth certificates and had, therefore, no documents and no access to services.

50. **Ms. Tsoumani** (Greece) said that the Government monitored compliance with the requirement that at least one third of posts in government bodies be occupied by women. Circulars were sent regularly to each body to remind it of the requirement. Political parties had established their own voluntary quotas, which were consistent with the levels set by the Government. A protocol had been signed between the Government and trade unions to ensure equal opportunities for women. The protocol also provided for financial incentives to encourage compliance.

51. **Ms. Yannakourou** said that partnerships outside marriage had no legal status in Greek law. The law did not intervene in such arrangements except in the event of domestic violence.

52. **Ms. Alexopoulou** said that she was not aware of a problem with immigrant children, but she would investigate the matter; information on the subject would be included in the next report if necessary.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.