

Exchange of good practices on gender equality

Women in economic decision making

Norway, 10-11 May 2012

Comments paper - Greece

Disclaimer:

The information contained in this publication
does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.

Women in economic decision making in Greece

Nancy Papalexandris

Athens University of Economics and Business

1. Introduction

The three papers describing good practices on gender equality with particular emphasis on women in economic decision-making offer excellent examples for promoting diversity & equality in corporate boards.

In Greece there have been several initiatives including mandatory quotas and sets of recommendations but mainly in the state sector and in public life. Mandatory measures have aimed at areas controlled by the state where public interest is involved.

Specifically, in order to promote women's participation in decision-making bodies since 2000 legislative measures took place aiming at the increase of female participation in politics and in state-appointed committees for research and technology. This legislation which included a mandatory quota of 1/3 for each gender was necessary because women in Greece are still underrepresented in politics, in Parliament, in local government and in Research Bodies.

At present, 1/3 of the candidates on elections lists for parliament, local community representatives as well as 1/3 of board members of public agencies and 1/3 of members in promotion committees for administrative employees of ministries and state controlled entities (Universities, Hospitals, Public Utilities etc.) have to be women.

As can be seen from the table 1, women's participation in the Greek Parliament has steadily increased since 2000. However there is still a considerable gap from the targeted quota.

Table 1: Female Participation in the Greek Parliament

Year	Total Members	Women Members	% of women members
2000	300	31	10.3
2004	300	39	13.0
2007	300	48	16.0
2009	300	52	17.3

Source: General Secretariate for Gender Equality

Considering women's qualifications, these targets are very feasible, given the fact that over the past 20 years the percentage of women in higher and post-graduate education has increased considerably having reached a point where more women than men are now holders of University degrees (Table 2)

Table 2: University Students in Greece

Year	Total No of Students	Women Students	% of women student
2005-6	171,967	102,353	59.52%
2007-8	170,422	102,792	60.32%
Post- Graduate Students			
2005-6	42,930	21,283	49.58%
2007-8	49,347	24,754	50.16%

Source: National Statistical Service of Greece

An area where women's participation in higher level jobs has increased spectacularly, without any particular measures, is public administration. Administrative jobs in the public sector is an area where entry systems favour women's participation since entry was as a rule through national exams and qualified women had many chances of gaining access. These women have gradually moved to higher positions. Furthermore, women show greater preference for the public sector where working conditions and tenure is in favour of work /life balance.

Table 3 shows women's participation in decision-making posts in the Public Sector.

Table 3: Percentage of women in administrative posts (2007)

	Ministries	State-owned companies	Local Community Organisations
General Directors	40.00%	69.60%	36.70%
Directors	35.50%	39.40%	45.70%
Department Heads	46.40%	76.30%	44.00%

Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs, Statistical Bulletins

Contrary to the public/state sector, the situation is not favourable in the private sector which is the subject of our discussion and where no legislative quotas have been imposed. However, various sets of recommendations and positive action programmes have been introduced under the initiative of the General Secretariat of Gender Issues and several non-governmental organisations.

As described in the 7th National Report of Greece to the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, (CEDAW) all legislative measures taken for gender equality aim at assisting women in facing difficult situations arising from having to raise their children alone, from having three or more children, from falling victims of trafficking or intra family violence, from facing unemployment or needing extra time off from their job for parental obligations. Such measures include extra pay or extra days of paid leave. Therefore all these measures concern social problems and family /work issues.

The only aspect of this legislation that is indirectly relevant to decision-making in economic life has to do with measures supporting work-life balance through paid maternity and parental leaves.

At the non-legislative/voluntary level, certain corporate initiatives have taken place mainly to sensitize public opinion in favour of increased women's participation. Some examples of good practice are the following:

- a. The Centre for Research in Equality Issues has participated in the European – funded programme “Localizing Gender Equality through Development” and “Taking Gender Equality to Local Communities”. Both projects aimed at promoting women's participation in political, public economic life in towns throughout Greece excluding the capital Athens. The programmes included research in local problems, counselling sessions to promote employment and entrepreneurship, organisation of conferences and published material with best practices from other European countries.
- b. Several Greek Universities have established both undergraduate & post-graduate study programmes for equality issues and programmes for female entrepreneurship.
- c. Several Greek Ministries (Ministry of National Defense, Ministry of Merchant Marine, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Tourism) have organised seminars against gender stereotyping and have introduced positive measures to encourage female students in applying for studies in traditionally male professions (the merchant marine).
- d. The Association of Women University Graduates has organised seminars to encourage girls in high schools to follow University Studies in Science and Technology.
- e. The Center for Research in Equality Issues has conducted an extensive programme throughout Greece to train high school educators in promoting and applying gender equality in their teachings.

These are only a few of the best practices applied in favour of equality which however do not touch directly our topic of discussion but which lay the foundation for higher participation of women in economic decision-making.

2. Policy Debate and Current and Future Developments

Apart from the initiatives mentioned above the question of women's participation in private economic decision making is in the centre of debate by University researchers in Business schools, by Association of Managers and by large corporations under their programmes of diversity or social corporate responsibility.

In the Athens University of Economics and Business, several papers have been published in relevant journals showing among others the limited percentage of women in top jobs (5%). The percentage of board membership which appears a little higher, is not necessarily a valid indication as many companies are family owned and female family members are offered seats without real decision making power.

The problem of the glass ceiling faced by women managers as well as the issue of attitudes towards women in management and differences between the two genders in leadership, supervisory and decision making styles have been subjects of academic research. Relevant findings are been discussed extensively in women's conferences, manager's forums and various events organised by women professionals. However

due to the economic crisis the country is facing, the hot subject is that of women's unemployment which shows much higher figures than the national average (21%).

An encouraging sign is the fact that, despite the low percentage of women top managers, a considerable percentage of middle managers or department heads in private corporations are women, especially in the functions of human resource management, marketing, communications, public relations and advertising. Lower percentages are found in finance and information technology departments something which is also common among corporations across Europe.

The general awareness created by research and other activities have produced some encouraging results especially among larger corporations. Policies favouring family/work balance, diversity, corporate social responsibility and positive measures for women's advancement in the corporate hierarchy are now used. Companies believe that in order to promote their company's reputation and improve their image as a good employer, an ethical business partner and a good corporate citizen they should deal with women's participation in higher jobs.

Many large and medium-sized companies take part in various annual prizes such as "Best Workplace", "European Foundation of Quality Management", "Investors in People", "Business Ethics Network" where they receive points for policies and practices favouring women's participation in economic decision making. These contests help in an indirect way to promote equality and sensitise corporate members about the potential benefits of female leadership. Research on attitudes towards women in management have shown that respondents who have experience with women top managers are more favourably disposed as they are no longer influenced by stereotypes about women's inability to serve in top jobs. (Papalexandris, Galanaki) (2007)

3. Transferability Issues

The good practice of Norway cannot easily be transferred to Greece. Quotas can be imposed in the public sphere as is the case with 1/3 of candidates for national and local community elections being women. This does not mean that the persons actually elected follow these quotas. In 2009 17.3 % of Greek Parliament members were women and there has been serious criticism against imposing a quota. The same quota was imposed for members of promotion committees for administrative personnel in public sector organisations. Here there was no problem as women being the large majority, it is sometimes difficult to find enough men to serve on the committees.

Finally the 1/3 quota imposed by law for state-appointed members of Scientific committees for research in Science and Technology has not been yet implemented with the excuse that not enough women have the appropriate expertise to occupy such posts. We can assume that state officials responsible for appointing members are very reluctant in enforcing the quota which would mean leaving out some well-established men scientists. Given the experience from the public sector, we can conclude that quotas in the private sector would hardly have any chance for success.

The example of U.K. and Denmark lend themselves more for transferability to Greece. Both examples are not mandatory and invite corporations to commit themselves on a voluntary basis to gender diversity and women's participation on supervisory boards. Both examples include a number of steps that co-signatories in Denmark and FTSE 350 chairmen must take in order to implement the recommendations. In both cases

monitoring, evaluating and following up is required after signing, in order to measure the impact of the initiative.

The U.K. example offers a little more detailed framework for reporting progress and is based on the Lord Davies Report which apparently bears weight and gives a lot of credibility to the initiative.

Furthermore the set of recommendations does not aim only at promoting gender equality but also at improving talent management, pay transparency and change in the workplace for better corporate effectiveness. Also, the involvement of the Financial Reporting Council of investors and of executive search firms as well as the provision for reviewing and reporting progress by the steering Board are very good measures which ensure that the initiative will be followed through and further reinforced.

Both the U.K. and the Danish initiatives could very well apply in Greece provided a strong non-governmental body such as the Confederation of Greek Industries, the Greek Network for Corporate Social Responsibility or the Greek Management Association is responsible for monitoring implementation. State backing should come from the Ministry of National Economy and Development but actual implementation should rely with one of these organisations.

Sources

Papalexandris N., Bourantas D., (1990), "Sex Differences in Leadership: Leadership Styles and Subordinate Satisfaction", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 5, No.4.

Papalexandris N., Bourantas D., (1991), "Attitudes towards Women as Managers: the Case of Greece", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol.2, No.2.

Council of Europe (2003) *Balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making*.

Petraki Kottis, A. and Ventoura, Z., (2004) *Women in Management in Greece*, *Women in Management Worldwide*, Ashgate, England.

Research Center for Equality Issues (2006), *Women's Participation in Political Decision-Making Centers in Greece*, Athens.

Papalexandris, N. and Galanaki, E. (2007) "Leadership Styles and acceptance of female managers in Greece: Fifteen years after". 9th Conference on International Human Resource Management, June 12-15, 2007, Tallinn, Estonia.

Vakola, M. and Apospori, E. (editors) (2007) "Women and Business Management: Obstacles, Myths and Expectations", Athens, Sideris publications.

Papalexandris, N., and Galanaki, E., (2008), "Attitudes Towards Women Managers", Chapter in *Women in Management*, edited by Vakola, M., and Apospori, E., Athens, Sideris Publications.

Galanaki, E., Papalexandris, N. and Chalikias J., (2009) "Revisiting leadership styles and attitudes towards women as managers in Greece: 15 years later", *Gender in Management: an International Journal*, Vol. 24, Numbers 7 and 8.

Galanaki, E., Papalexandris, N. and Chalikias J. (2009). "Revisiting leadership styles and attitudes towards women as managers in Greece: 15 years later", *Gender in Management: an International Journal*, Vol. 24, No 7, pp.484-504.

General Secretariate for Gender Equality (2011), *Seventh National Report of Greek to the United Nations Committee (CEDAW)*, Athens.

Halkias, D., Galanaki, E., Juna, N. and Akrivos, P. (2011). "Dreams of My Father: A Father-Daughter Succession Story in a Greek Family Firm" in Halkias, D., Thurman, P., Smith, C., Nason, R., (Eds), *Father-Daughter Succession in Family Business: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, Gower Publishers, London.

Rafailidou, M., (2012). "The Glass Ceiling Effect in the corporate world: an Institutional Theory Perspective", Ph.D. Dissertation, Athens University of Economics and Business.