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## Comparing frames, framing comparisons: Greece/EU frames on gender inequality in politics

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COMPARING FRAMES, FRAMING COMPARISONS:  
GREECE/EU FRAMES ON GENDER INEQUALITY  
IN POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

*This article intends to present the main similarities and differences between Greece and the EU in respect to the framing of gender inequality in political decision making as a policy issue, based on the ways that the problem is diagnosed. It also aims at the formulation of a hypothesis which argues that beyond the above similarities and differences, which may tint in a different colour measures and policies showing one case more gender sensitive or more «traditional» than the other, there exists one basic underlying similarity, relative to the conceptualisation of the notion of gender it-self, which frames all gender related policies, but also their comparison. A framing which cannot but show the existence of inherent boundaries to the out-come of gender mainstreaming as a strategy, since the way we conceptualise gender is determining for the degree to which the promoted policies are disruptive or legitimating in the end, of the existing gender order.*

Divergence in the framing of gender equality policies among EU states and between them and the EU<sup>1</sup> has certainly a lot to do with implementation problems and differences in the pace noted in the application of respective policies. Traditional even sexist framings of gender equality issues emerge

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1. On policy frames, as specific constructions that give meaning to reality, as well as on frame analysis as applied in the Mageeq project and thus used for the needs of the present article, see M. Verloo, this volume. C. Bacchi, 1999, is valuable for the investigation of the construction of policy problems.

often, if one is willing to look for them, in otherwise progressive even overtly women-friendly policy discourses, while gender mainstreaming as a strategy seems in practice not to be up to its potential, (Verloo, this volume) which could be seen as disruptive of the existing gender order.<sup>2</sup> If gender mainstreaming intends at the re-thinking of all national policies and EU aims incorporating a «gender perspective», it does not seem to be succeeding. Often, it is again about «adding women» to what already exists, an addition that according to many critics can be less efficient than through specific women targeted policies.<sup>3</sup> It seems that something is missing in «gender mainstreaming» if there is a wish to go beyond the old equation gender= women, while the imperative of the incorporation of «a gender perspective», begs the question *which perception of gender will frame the above perspective?* A question rarely discussed. As for national divergences in the framing of gender equality policies, they are obviously due to differences in socio-political cultures, to the specific characteristics of the system of gender relations in each society and its more or less traditional character, linked to the development of the welfare state and the topical history of feminist demands. Also, the existing political rapports de force play an important role, as changes in government around Europe have shown.

This article has a dual goal. First it intends to present the main similarities and differences between Greece and the EU in respect to the framing of gender inequality in political decision making as a policy issue, based mainly on the ways that the problem is diagnosed. Without any generalising pretensions, it is based on the analysis of specific texts (see footnote 8) that are perceived as indicative of the situation. The issue centres on the presence of «too few women» in political decision making and the way it is *represented* in political discourse as a problem to be solved. Comparing frames relative to gender inequality in political decision making as a policy issue between Greece and the EU<sup>4</sup> presents an image of expected similarities and differences. Expected similarities because Greek gender

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2. See an overview of recent critical findings concerning gender mainstreaming in M. Verloo, this volume. See, also, M. Stratigaki, 2005.

3. See M. Verloo, 2002 and E. Lombardo, 2003, who refers to un-published conference papers.

4. The comparison, presented in a concise form here, is based on prior work done by the Mageeq group, and particularly by the Greek team of EKKE, the EU team and especially the «political participation» sub-group of Mageeq, comprising V. Jalusic, E. Lombardo, M. Pantelidou Maloutas and B. Sauer. On Mageeq methodology see M. Verloo, this volume.

policy is highly influenced by EU directives, even jargon, since the respective policy is rather recent in this country and highly dependent on what goes on at the EU level. One might even wonder if gender equality measures would have been implemented in Greece during the last decade, when feminist demands and respective challenges of the political system have almost died out, if it were not for the need (and desire) to go along with EU directives. As for expected differences, they mainly relate to the inherent divergence of the compared entities and to the specific Greek socio-political system and political culture, which are very different from the main (Nordic) EU input on questions of gender equality. However, both similarities and differences have internal elements that respectively show divergence within similarity and homogeneity within difference, elements not always of minor importance. Secondly, this article aims also at the formulation of a hypothesis which argues that beyond the above similarities and differences, which may tint in a different colour measures and policies showing one case more gender sensitive or more «traditional» than the other, there exists one basic, primary, underlying similarity, relative to the conceptualisation of the notion of gender it-self, which frames all gender related policies. A framing which cannot but show the existence of inherent boundaries to the out-come of gender mainstreaming as a strategy, since the way we conceptualise gender is determining for the degree to which the promoted policies are disruptive or legitimating in the end, of the existing gender order.

Thus, I want to argue that yes, the way gender inequality is framed as a policy issue in specific areas and different countries is very important for policy out-comes. And the investigation of the framing of gender equality policy in Europe is of great importance to all those interested in its successful implementation. However, still more important, even determining for the former is the way gender *itself* is perceived and conceptualised. A conceptualisation that as a rule is not discussed, left un-questioned, appearing even as un-questionable, framing in a non overt manner all gender issues that seem hence predisposed to lead in the long term to dead-ends, or at the most to partial, limited changes, within undecided on and somehow «automatically» emerging boundaries. Under-theorised and referring to «common sense», the dominant perception of gender frames even the way comparisons of gender equality frames are made, since policy-makers do not have the monopoly of embracing unquestioned assumptions on gender. Researchers too have to investigate their own theoretical a priori, in order to proceed to a comparison of frames in gender equality

policies as free of pre-conceptions as possible. To investigate and clarify the way we perceive gender (and the way we *wish* to conceptualise it, if we are to target at the radical change of the existing system of gender relations) is definitely a necessity if we wish to formulate, plan and implement gender equality policies that are subversive and deliver on their goals. It is also a crucial political issue, whose out-come will determine the impact that gender mainstreaming as a strategy will have on the existing gender order in the long term.

As for the specific area of women's quantitative deficiency in political decision making as an expression of exclusion, it is also an illustration of the obvious fact that «gender-neutral» citizenship conceals an inherent androcentrism. This is the reason why citizenship itself did not undergo substantial changes after the acquisition of political rights by women. The historical exclusion of women from citizenship, as well as their present day acceptance, are permeated by the same perception of gender, of its nature and its significance. Despite any differentiation in the discourse that has legitimized women's political exclusion, this perception has always referred to an essentialist rationale concerning attributes of men and women, with the accompanying degradation of women and their subsequent marginalization.<sup>5</sup> The current attempts to overcome this marginalization are however defined by the way the problem is framed. If this framing continues to respect the same essentialist rationale while promoting a call for action, it doesn't seem possible to achieve substantial change in the existing system of gender relations. Thus, while the substitution of a policy of exclusive measures for *women* by a strategy of mainstreaming a *gender* perspective<sup>6</sup> is very positive, because it permits the framing of gender inequality issues within a logic of power relations which are problematic per se, in order that this vision prevails, what is needed may be a new conceptualization of gender itself, through the challenging of the obvious, of that which comes forth as given and self-evident. This however is exceptionally difficult since gender continues to be one of the immutable points of reference for the formation of the subjects' identity and one of the most powerful factors differentiating their socialization.

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5. On the hypothesis of the inherent androcentric character of citizenship, see mainly S. M. Okin, 1979; C. Pateman, 1988, 1989; N. Fraser, L. Gordon, 1994 and R. Lister, 1997.

6. Which should not exclude positive action when necessary, using gender mainstreaming as an alibi.

I. BASIC SIMILARITIES (AND INTERNAL VARIATIONS)  
IN GREEK AND EU DIAGNOSTIC FRAMES CONCERNING  
THE WOMEN IN POLITICAL DECISION MAKING ISSUE

In the texts that have been analysed in the Greek as well as in the EU case<sup>7</sup> the diagnosis of the problem, i.e. the answer to the *What's the problem with women's inequality in political decision-making* question, seems rather under-developed and shallow centred on the agreement that women's small presence in political decision-making is problematic and requires measures.<sup>8</sup> Next to this initial similarity, there is a common first level of tautological framing expressed in the equation *the problem of women's low numbers in political decision making is women's low numbers in political decision making*. A quantitative framing sanctioning a tautological diagnosis restricted in many cases to the statement that there are few women in

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7. The primary analysis of texts in relation to gender inequality in politics for the Greek case has been effectuated by M. Pantelidou Maloutas in collaboration in part with M. Filiopoulou and in part with A. Hadjiyanni. The respective work for the EU texts was done by P. Meier and M. Paantjens. The whole of the Mageeq team however contributed in one way or the other in this collective work. Beyond primary analysis, the study of the issue of gender inequality in politics was done by the sub-group mentioned in note 4. The present article owes a lot to the prior work of the above group.

8. Greek texts consist mainly in the speeches pronounced during the Parliamentary discussion on the bill of law concerning the institution on quotas for local elections (March 2001) with the addition of three political speeches to gender equality friendly audiences and a text published in an official pro gender-equality pamphlet. Among the selected texts are the speech of an important personality of the Left known for her feminist views, two speeches from representatives of the Right, the speech of a representative of the majority who is against quotas from a «post-feminist» point of view but votes in favour, the speech of the minister who initiated the discussion, another speech of a majority MP, and the argumentation «against» by a representative of the C.P. EU texts belong to three categories. The first contains policy documents from European institutions, including resolutions and recommendations from the Council, decisions, communications and reports from the Commission, EU Presidency reports, resolutions and reports from the European Parliament, etc. A second category regroups other documents emanating from these institutions or from individual actors related to the European institutions. Examples of such texts are speeches held by Commissioners at the occasion of conferences, press releases or awareness raising and informing brochures published by the European institutions. This category also contains the transcriptions of the debates of the European Parliament. The third category contains documents from other institutions or actors closely linked to and financed by the European institutions, such as research reports or awareness raising and documenting brochures written and published on behalf of the European institutions. Documents emanating from the European Women Lobby are also included.

decision making and *that* is problematic, usually limited to this descriptive and superficial «non-analysis», which does not refer to the *causes* of the matter. The hierarchical system of gender relations is almost never referred to as a problem in this context, while this quantitative framing, which has the highest occurrence by far in both the Greek and the EU analysed texts, calls in various ways to the need of increasing numbers. In the Greek text's framing especially, due obviously to the subject matter which is mainly the 2001 discussion on quotas, the simplistic syllogism too few women=problem=need to impose more women, is evident.

Thus, *on a first level* of analysis the question is mainly one of numbers in both cases, while additionally in the EU the issue is (expectedly) represented in reference to target figures set by national governments and the EU (percentages of women in elected and decision-making bodies). Hence the problem seems mainly to be a quantitative one, which in the end depoliticises the issue of gender inequality in politics, as it is usually not linked to a discourse concerning gender as a system of power relations. This is the case in the Greek framing but also often in the EU (with the exception of specific analysed texts based on gender expert's speeches). Indeed the fact that few women (like few other social «inferiors» in any sense, be it class, sexual preference, ethnic origin etc), are in positions of power, is obviously to be expected, as a sign of social inferiority of the respective social category. If women's gender was not conceptualised and lived as a social inferiority, we would expect to find approximatively equal numbers of women and men in political and other decision making, as we would expect to find approximate numbers of women and men as party members as people declaring high levels of political interest, etc. Which is obviously usually not the case. Women's low numbers in political decision making is one expression among many, of their lower social status; it is not a *problem per se* (or not just a problem per se), but a symptom of a wider social problem, not identified as such when the diagnosis is limited to the problematic character of small numbers. (This perception is facilitated in the Greek case by the prevalence of the *democracy* over the *equality* frame. See here-below).

A notable difference within this common quantitative framing is that the reference to the notion of *balanced* participation is much less used in the Greek case. In Greece, furthermore, the issue is mainly framed as «few women in decision-making» (and not «women's under representation»). Thus, another notable divergence emerges within the common quantitative way of framing, showing that this initial similarity which is to be expected since the EU inspired gender equality policy in Greece cannot but be

promoted in terms harmonised with the official EU discourse, is somewhat challenged: There are mainly two ways to see women's numerical deficiency in political decision-making, one referring to the issue as «under-representation» of women as a social category, proving the existence of an essentialist conception of «gender representation» implying, contrary to the existing theory of democracy, that women in Parliament, for example, *represent women*, and another referring to the issue in terms of presence/participation, expressing in a quantified form the view that too few women indicate the existence of exclusionary practices. Essentialist also, but tinted with a logic of justice and anti-discrimination. Thus within what can be called «tautological» framing, the differentiation of whether the problem to be dealt with is framed as a *representation* or a *participation/presence* issue must be noted, because it is telling as to the underlying assumptions concerning the central political issue of gender and democracy: The Greek discourse framing the issue much less often as a *representation* issue than the EU (and also less than other EU countries), indicates maybe that the «dual universality» thesis, inherent in parity demands, is much less spread in Greek political culture. Thus the under-lying logic of parity will probably be much less appealing for this additional reason. The above hypothesis partly explains also the discursive insistence on the *temporary* character of quotas. At the same time, the need for measures, both legislative and at the level of welfare state provisions is a common element of Greek and EU framing concerning the solution of the problem.

A common «qualitative» participation frame can be identified also in the Greek and EU framing of the issue. Much less wide-spread than the quantitative frame, the lack of a «feminine touch» in politics, with all its essentialist pre-suppositions, exists both in the EU and GR text: *Society suffers from the lack of women in decision-making*. In the EU, there are three basic ideas: first, women's voices are silenced in politics, which means that politics lacks women's qualities and a so-called «feminine» dimension; second, women's issues lack consideration; third, women's skills and qualities are said to be beneficial for the labour market, for a better society and the policy-making process. In this discourse, women's political «exclusion» from decision-making is considered as a waste of human resources and skills. The argument that politics lacks a «feminine touch» is also apparent in Greek texts. Although it is not always specified *what* this dimension would imply, it seems to refer to the idea that politics and power are not humane enough, while women, through their specific feminine qualities could make them more compassionate, thus producing a qualitative change. The idea underlying the



above references to the «qualitative» lack of women seems to be that the proposed measure, by mixing what already exists with «women's values» referring to care and concern for others, will make it better. Thus, the measure is not targeted at the change of gender inequality structures or androcentric values, but at their juxtaposition to «feminine» ones. The conclusion that could be drawn from this problematique is that the system of gender relations per se does not necessitate a change. Neither do men. It is *women* who should change, in the sense of interfering more in politics and undertaking decision-making posts, an addition that will make politics more humane. If, thus the latter appear also in need of change, it is a superficial change, necessitating no structural transformation, just the addition of women to the existing political processes.

Another frame that could be seen as similar in the Greek and EU texts that have been analysed refers to the Europeanization/modernisation discourse, which is very present implicitly or explicitly in Greek frames, while in the EU the issue is sometimes represented as *failing to achieve target figures* set by governments and the EU. Thus, there is similarity in a sense there, the main idea being that the failure to include positive measures for increasing the share of women in elected bodies is a problem, due to the pressure to conform to EU policy prescriptions and other member states' regulations. Both the EU and other European countries have a legitimating role for pro-quotas discourses. However, in the Greek case the modernisation discourse has a very long and emotionally charged history since the modernisation/conservation divide forms a primary dividing line in Greek political culture, a divide that cuts horizontally the Greek society, and is present in all its expressions.<sup>9</sup> In practice, the Greek pro-quotas discourses seek legitimacy in other EU countries' regulations wanting to distance Greece from third-world countries where women's percentages in political decision making are small. Comparisons of women's percentages with other countries is framed in terms of the modernisation argument, i.e. alignment with more developed countries and distance from less developed ones, as a sign of modernisation. In a sense, the «Europeanization» aspect is secondary to the modernisation one, while obviously both go towards the same direction. But it is the modernisation argument that finds supporters on (almost) the whole of the ideological spectrum, appearing thus as a strong legitimating factor, able to attract supporters from all parties.

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9. On the duality of Greek political culture see, mainly, N. Diamandouros, 1994.

## II. BASIC DIFFERENCES (AND INTERNAL SIMILARITIES) IN GREEK AND EU DIAGNOSTIC FRAMES CONCERNING THE WOMEN IN POLITICAL DECISION MAKING ISSUE

It is on a *second level* of framing that notable differences are made more apparent between Greek and EU frames relative to gender inequality in political decision making: The first comment refers to the issue of the labour market, as linked to women's presence in decision making, almost totally lacking from the Greek framing but very present (as expected due to the history of EU gender equality policy), in the EU frames. The second notable difference refers to the problematique of persistence: women's small participation in decision-making *persists* in spite of the measures adopted. This shows both that policy measures adopted prove to be ineffective, insufficient and not far-reaching and that there is resistance to change the existing political context. (On another level of analysis, we could say that this lack of efficiency could be considered as indicative of the existence of a basic underlying problem linked to the specific inherent conceptualisation of gender that frames all promoted policies, which is the main argument in this paper). Obviously this reference to persistence is much more apparent in the EU frames than in Greece, whose gender equality policy is very recent. Also, gender equality as a founding principle of EU legislation serves as a frame of the discourse in the EU, while being inexistent in the Greek case.

The reference to the issue as a *problem of democracy* is on the contrary common, if much more wide-spread in Greek discourse. However in the EU case there is the additional matter of it's being a sign of the lack of legitimacy of EU political institutions. While the common existence of the democracy frame in both the Greek and the EU framings could be considered a notable similarity, hence the respective reference seems wrongly placed under the present heading, however, the fact that in the Greek case the legitimating reference to democracy is not an additional, co-occurrent reference to equality but *is placed in its stead*, makes democracy as a frame a differentiating factor between the two entities.<sup>10</sup> This lack of co-occurrence in the Greek frames is certainly due to a kind of strategic framing: The syllogism refers to the small number of women in political

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10. It must also be noted that in the prognosis of the issue, there is a notable difference in respect to the *democracy frame*, since on the EU level fighting gender inequality in politics does not seem to be strongly framed as a democracy issue, while this frame (in accordance to the respective diagnosis) is strong in the Greek discourse in the prognosis also.

decision making which proves that there exists a problem for democracy and its quality (sometimes there is explicit mention of a democratic deficit). A *democracy frame*, explicitly or implicitly dominant on the second level of the Greek framing which furthermore seems linked to the Europeanization/modernisation frame. The majority of speakers on the issue understand the problem as a problem for democracy and its quality, often harmonised with an EU jargon on democratic deficit. However this framing is certainly context related, since it is identified in speeches addressed to the Parliament and targeted at the better legitimation of the issue and its marketability in order to obtain the desired result of voting in favour of gender quotas in local elections. Presenting quotas as a democracy issue is largely a way to make them accepted by an audience such as the Greek Parliament which is not particularly gender sensitive. Thus, in order to gain the greatest possible support in favour of quotas, democracy is referred to as more attractive than gender equality.<sup>11</sup> In other contexts (women or gender equality friendly audiences), the issue is framed as an equality problem (*equality frame*), which shows the importance of context in framing. An additional differentiating aspect of the common reference to democracy between Greek and EU frames is that the *democracy frame* is not very different in the end from a *modernisation frame* in the Greek case. In both frames, underlining, latent discourses resonate like a comment on the need of further modernisation of contemporary Greece, wishing to stress the need for a democratic profile in which gender equality is implemented, thus a profile of a modern European country, whose image is distanced from its oriental neighbours. «*We do not deserve such a democracy*», in which so few women participate in political decision-making, a deficiency with real and symbolic consequences, summarises this attitude. A further difference between Greek

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11. The demand for quotas first appeared during the 1989 electoral campaign in Greece. The issue was then predominantly framed in terms of equality by an important part of what was then the women's movement (while the main body of the autonomous feminist movement was then, against quotas). Within the party in power in 2001, when the parliamentary debate on quotas took place (PASOK-socialist), many women were in the past active in EGE (its women's organisation) demanding quotas in terms of equality. The same women seem in 2001 to frame the issue mainly as a democracy demand within Parliament, diverging from the EU orthodoxy. However, this seems to be just an apparent shift in time, due to strategic framing as was noted above. One is expected nowadays to find the demand of the increase of the number of women in political decision-making (referring hence to the national and not local level) framed both as an equality and a democracy issue, the stress depending on the context of the speech.

and EU texts in which the democracy frame can be identified refers to the fact that in prognosis – which in both cases is more developed than diagnosis while the goal, consistent with the definition of the problem, it is to increase the number of women in decision-making– the solution is framed mainly as *equality* in the EU texts, concretised as the need for *gender balance* in decision-making, while in the Greek case the legitimating norm is again *democracy* and is mainly concretised in the increased number of women in local political decision-making through *quotas*. Thus the EU texts, expectantly, merely *suggest* policy measures without any binding provisions, while the Greek ones mainly argue in favour of the immediate legislation of quotas. However, the difference in the normative legitimation of the solution to the problem of gender inequality in decision making is even stronger in the prognosis than in the diagnosis, since in the former the difference in the specific weight of «democracy», as legitimating norm is much bigger.

While «feminist frames» appear in both cases only in explicitly feminist discourses from expected sources (gender experts in the EU and pro-gender equality pamphlet in the Greek texts) what mainly differentiates Greek and EU frames on this front is the existence in the first case of the expressed wish of certain women speakers in the Greek context *to not be identified with women or feminism*. Insisting that they speak in the name of all (and not only women), and for the benefit of democracy (and not gender equality which can be seen as favouring women). Even women politicians known for their feminist tendencies avoid being identified as feminist in the specific context and claim to speak in the name of all, not only of women. This distance from feminism could also be interpreted as a «strategic framing», in order that the pro-quota argumentation be accepted by the male dominated (and not gender sensitive) political environment of the parliament. Thus, it is highly context related, which does not mean that it does not have important ideological and socialisation repercussions.

In connection to the above observation, what is more important to note in this context is the impression that one gets from the EU framing, which (in all its essentialist and «men are the norm» bias) shows that gender equality is perceived as a *per se* legitimate issue. On the contrary, in the Greek framing it seems that pro-gender equality discourses, and in particular those dealing with gender inequality in political decision making arguing in favour of quotas have to be *disguised into something else in order to be heard*. Strategic or not, and in spite of the specific context of the discussion on quotas, this framing shows that the appeal to gender equality is far less legitimating than the respective appeal to democracy, which cannot but

create problems to the implementation of targeted gender policies. Also, this framing fails to play its educating and socialisation role towards society, which will be informed via the press and other media of the argumentation in favour of a measure like the legislation of gender quotas in local elections mainly in terms of democracy. That, in connection to the appeal for «women's special aptitudes for the local». It is a fact that in the Greek frames women are perceived in much more traditional terms, than in the EU frames, in the sense of an acceptance of the gender division of labour as given, terms that are not challenged even in the most, otherwise, «progressive» discourses. However «women's difference» as an implicit frame is present in both (EU and Greek) cases, even if it is qualified differently.

In the Greek case women's «difference» and their traditional roles as wives and mothers are accepted as given and even sometimes celebrated in both conservative and supposedly progressive discourses, while as a rule the state is called upon to help them «carry their burden». Women are described as *different but equal*, thus the need for measures. Pro-quota (as well as anti-quota) discourses refer to «women's difference». The latter, both in their conservative and «progressive» variant, present quotas as insulting to women, since they supposedly discredit women's equal value and dignity with men, from whom they *differ*. It is even explicitly noted that quotas would exclude qualified, capable, and influential male political candidates from local electoral lists. Thus quotas are said to create a ridiculous situation in which (unqualified) female family members of male politicians will end up being added to local electoral lists. This argumentation (which in its overt form has a *single* occurrence in our texts) is indirectly claiming that women are unqualified and incapable for politics as they are «the other» in the political system. However, traditional, essentialist, and sexist perceptions of gender roles abound both in «progressive» (which is more important) and conservative discourse and can be noted in a more crude form in the Greek than the EU texts. Also, the stressing of women's psychological problems, and insecurities, detached from their social context, attests the existence of a highly traditional framing of the issue, which is linked to the discourse of «women's difference», as its more backward expression.

Thus in the Greek case, and based on the analysed texts the small number of women in political decision-making seems mainly framed as a *democracy issue* linked to an implicit or explicit *modernisation/Europeanization* discourse, all of the above expressed from a «women's difference» point of

view which frames all argument. This is very important to stress, because it shows that gender equality measures *are presented* (at least in parliament, but this framing is very influential, because it passes through the media reporting debates), as being implemented for reasons that do not really refer to the need of implementing *equality regardless of gender*, and even, in a sense, for reasons that contradict their (apparently inherent) logic. And this forms an important difference with the case of the EU texts, which cannot but have repercussions on gender equality policies in general. This does not mean that equality is not detected in positive terms in Greek discourses, even if this is implicit, but rather that equality is *not presented as an issue*. The importance of framing in *constructing* what is problematic and what is not, makes evident the specific weight that has a presentation of gender inequality in political decision-making not as an equality issue, in the long-term implementation of gender mainstreaming or any other anti-inequality strategy. The fact that in this particular case at least, in relation to the discussion on the legislation of quotas in Greek local elections, the gender relations system *per se*, does not seem to be targeted, results in a framing of gender equality policy in terms that attest to an eschatological vision other than the one expressed in the EU framing, and highly divergent from EU explicit aims concretised in the strategy of gender mainstreaming. Strategic framing has indeed a bigger chance of succeeding. But at a cost.

### III. GENDER PERCEPTION AS A PRIMARY SIMILARITY

All the above similarities and differences between Greek and EU frames relative to the issue of gender inequality in political decision-making are *themselves framed within a primary perception of gender*, which seems to be common. What must be clarified thus, in respect to an initial comment made here above, refers to *which perception of gender frames* the imperative of the incorporation of «a gender perspective» in the specific policies. Does this perception diverges, between the Greek social reality of a traditional gender order and a more «progressive» EU discourse more influenced by Nordic realities, as one could initially expect? Or, what remains unsaid about gender creates an initial commonality between EU and Greek frames, in accordance to the dominant, latent conceptualisation? The frequent use of gender as a synonym of women, noticed in the above analysis, as well as the common framing in reference to «women's difference» as an undisputable fact of life, imply indeed that at this primary level of framing there is an important commonality.

Gender, as expected, appears in the analysed texts pre-dominantly in terms of social categories, and is conceptualised as a bi-polarity which is taken for granted, accepted, and not discussed. While Greek texts stress more strongly and in a more traditional ideological sense «women's difference» (often stressing roles like mother and wife), in both cases (EU and Greek texts) gender is always perceived as a dichotomy, creating two distinct social categories, different from each other, a difference that appears undisputed and for whom other aspects of inequality are rarely mentioned. Occasional references to class are made, but in general one has the impression that women and men are perceived as internally homogenous social categories, with given, known characteristics which differ from each other. In the Greek texts, furthermore, gender as identity is largely perceived in stereotypical terms (women's vulnerability, women as emotional voters, carers of others, with special experience, peaceful, bearers of intuitive knowledge, victims, innovators, «different» thus potentially able to change political ethics etc.). In the EU, where also mainly social categories are addressed, women's identity is mentioned mainly with the assumption that women will defend women's issues. It is evident that in both cases a profoundly essentialist perception of gender prevails, the existing dichotomy accepted as a given that creates «women's difference», a difference that defines what women have to offer in politics, implying also (more in the EU than in Greek texts) that women in politics will serve women's interests, as if the latter are known in advance, given once and for all, common to all women and non debatable.

Thus women, regardless of political or ideological identity, social origin, specific skills etc, appear in the end as bearers of one pre-dominant and internally homogenous identity, characterised by specific attributes that often contradict all established definitions of the political (vulnerability, sensitivity, insecurities), but in the end are welcomed as an addition to the existing political order, which needs this specific amendment, born out of «women's difference», so that it becomes more representative. This perception of gender illustrates in a clear manner how a social category historically excluded from the public sphere due to its gender, finally acquired equal political rights as subjects/bearers of those very attributes that effected their exclusion. Which partially explains the existing inequality in the substantial use of equal rights. In the Greek case, these specific preconceptions about gender identities and an essentialist framing of women's identity commonly prevail in all types of discourses, beyond the ones analysed here, especially in the ones concerning women politicians' inter-party co-operation: The acceptance and legitimation

of gender identity as the sole basis of political alliances, for example, a basis that is expected to automatically create common views and attitudes on gender issues, negates in the end women as political agents and legitimises the perception of women as a-historically given, for whom all other identities, i.e. ideological, party, class etc., are insignificant in comparison to their gender inscription. Women's «difference» is thus further legitimised, setting specific boundaries to any policy against gender inequality. Also the idea that women will (necessarily) represent «women's interests» depoliticises once more the issue, shows again the dominance of an essentialist perception of gender categories, or else appears to imply that to *be a woman is a political stance*. The acceptance and legitimation of the view that women in Parliament, regardless of ideological identity and party induction, will have the freedom (and the wish) to act in favour of women, to *represent* women as social category, to act in a sense unaccountable to their party and in the absence of alternative mechanisms of accountability, is however remarkable, from the perspective of democracy.<sup>12</sup>

While one must admit that the recognition of the problematic character of women's social subordination expressed as political marginalisation, something which has been increasingly acknowledged in the EU since the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam, is positive, at the same time it is obviously not sufficient. A major problem, as outlined in the previous analysis, refers to the fact that the terms of this recognition *frame the issue* in ways that seem to obstruct its long-term radical solution. Since 1997, the equality of men and women in all fields and activities of the EU has become further legitimized as a palpable aim of all policies instituted by the member-states, and as a criterion by which they are measured. Next to measures for «equal opportunities» for men and women and positive actions intending to correct women's initial disadvantage in a targeted area (conceptualised nevertheless in Article 141 as «specific advantages», a framing which is very problematic), *mainstreaming a gender perspective* in all policies, has become an obligation of all EU member states. Setting aside the academic controversies about the term itself, its political significance linked to its failing to create legally enforceable rights and the risk of inertia it presents in terms of specific policies for women,<sup>13</sup> (especially in societies with long tradition in gender policy) mainstreaming a gender perspective in policy making should

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12. On this type of reasoning, see an interesting critique in A. Phillips, 1998, p. 238.

13. For a presentation of the relative discussion see E. Lombardo, 2003. See, also, M. Stratigaki, 2005.



not just equate to mainstreaming a pro-women attitude. Something that happens often, especially when there is a strong political will to follow European directives, no long tradition of gender policy, (as in the Greek case) linked to the lack of prior clarification of what exactly is a *gender perspective* to be mainstreamed. Depending on the conceptualisation of gender, it is obvious that different policies will be implemented as means, and different ends will be thus obtained. What is more, it is highly debatable whether the dominant, dichotomous perception of gender, which prevails as unquestionably accepted, can permit the mainstreaming of a gender perspective with radical results. Because the idea of gender difference as a manifestation of the dichotomy, expressed as «women's difference», is simultaneously part of our actual everyday life of profoundly unequal gender relations *and* an ideological mystification of the dominant gender regime which functions in favour of its legitimation.<sup>14</sup>

Based on the above, a conceptual clarification of *gender* appears as an imperative, especially felt as far as framings of gender policies in the EU are concerned. Because obviously, *mainstreaming a gender perspective* in all policies presupposes a clear answer as to *what it is that we want to mainstream*. What exactly is a gender perspective, or a gender equality perspective? Which perception of gender we wish to promote? Which means, initially and primarily, what perception of gender must support all relative policies? That is, *what is gender*? How do we perceive and conceptualise it, and how do we *wish* to politically conceptualise it, in view of a future society in which it will not be a hierarchical factor? This is a political issue/question, that urgently needs to be addressed and one whose answer is crucial for the feminist emancipatory project, even if it is expected that such a project will create disputes and conflicts. I strongly suspect that the prevailing un-discussed conceptualisation of gender as a dichotomy, and the subsequent acceptance of «women's difference» obstruct the application of «gender mainstreaming» as a strategy, because they pre-frame the appeal to a «gender perspective» that is non subversive. Indeed, the way gender mainstreaming seems to be framed at its source, i.e. the EU level, does not seem to challenge the common sense perception of sex/gender as a self-evident dichotomy, which means that any radical potential it appears to have will be un-fulfilled. Mainstreaming a gender equality perspective in all

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14. See C. Pateman, 1989, p. 131, for a similar comment on the separation between the private and the public sphere.

policies is of course much more egalitarian than usual policy-making, more well-meaning against flagrant gender exclusions. Still, to not be ill-disposed vis-à-vis gender equality is not enough, (even if in some societies this is still important). We must also not be conceptually ill-equipped to address the problems of gender inequality at its root, which does not seem possible if, on a policy level, the perception of gender that prevails is a dichotomous one celebrating women's «difference».

In order to produce a new gender order what is needed on the level of theory is the elaboration of another conception of gender that does not intrinsically refer to a hierarchy. (Pantelidou Maloutas M., forthcoming). The *conceptual clarification of gender* is furthermore an absolute prerequisite in order to avoid the common confusion of any policy related to gender to be equated to pro-women measures, with the well known disadvantages of legitimising a view of women as always being in need of protection, and as citizens demanding special rights (as opposed to the *substantial application of citizens rights* to them as well). Which commonly happens in more traditional societies with no tradition in gender policy. Even, or maybe especially, in areas in which gender mainstreaming is obliged to adopt special measures for women, i.e. in the «balanced participation» of men and women in the political decision-making, there must be a prior conceptual analysis of *how we perceive gender*. Otherwise, latent assumptions and common sense perceptions will always obstruct the application of policies that may have a subversive potential (which can easily be neutralised), turning them into partial reforms in favour of specific categories of women, which is of course a good thing, but which also can rob radical gender policy from its potential. The solutions customarily proposed for dealing with what is viewed as women's political «under-representation», in the manner that they are usually discursively framed may, in the long term undermine their own aims, i.e. equal access to citizen participation in the political process regardless of gender. Because the specific way in which gender itself is perceived does not leave much space for radical change. In order to avoid the above, it is necessary to clarify *how we perceive* and conceptualize elements of everyday life such as gender and the notorious «difference» between the sexes, while we also define how we conceive of a future in which gender-specific social inequality will become increasingly eroded. These clarifications become necessary in order to outline a response to the «why» of women's «under-representation» in political decision-making, while at the same time we take into account its specific weight in

relation to other political parameters: These include the usual limited participation of women as social category in the general political process. The above clarifications are also needed for sketching a response as to how women's «under-representation» can be overcome in a manner which would indicate a substantial change in the system of gender relations. That is, a way to overcome the problem of the limited political presence of women which will require much more than merely piecemeal measures of mainly a quantitative nature that do not interfere with the root causes of women's marginalization and thus, have no radical, subversive consequences beneficial both to the social actors and to democracy.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, gender remaining un-clarified, and «gender perception» referring to a tacit, well meaning view expressing the wish to fight flagrant gender inequalities, robs gender mainstreaming from its radical potential and gives voice to different critiques that often express a vague uneasiness for the concept. If mainstreaming refers to the dominant perception of gender stripped of its most unacceptable expressions, it seems that there is a disproportion between expectations and possible outcomes. If the aim is the creation of a society in which gender will not function as a hierarchy, will not determine life courses and hinder autonomy and self-realisation, and thus in politics will not exclude and marginalise one category of citizens, that is a society in which gender will be no more than a life style choice, then the means cannot steadily legitimise a view of «gender difference». Yet, the latter is expressed in all gender equality policies which suppose women and men as given and obvious social actors belonging to two distinguished by specific boundaries gender categories and bearing different identities, that must nevertheless be treated as equals, with equal value and opportunities. This view of gender equality is nowhere more clear than in languages (like Greek) in which gender equality is translated as «equality of the *two sexes*». The aim for gender equality policy in such a context, in which assumptions about sex/gender are left unquestioned, can be nothing more than the creation of a society in which more women gain positions of power and adopt men's life patterns supported by welfare and other provisions. A profoundly narrow and un-ambitious aim today, which could furthermore be better served by more women targeted policies. The problem however is that societies with more traditional gender order do not have the exclusivity of commonsensical perceptions of gender. It is clear that the same framing

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15. These ideas are more developed in M. Pantelidou Maloutas, forthcoming.

prevails at the EU level also, perpetuating thus a dichotomous, inherently hierarchical perception of gender, which undermines gender mainstreaming as a strategy with radical potential.

On the contrary, if we do not accept the unquestioned assumptions about gender, if we do not conceptualise it as a dichotomy, if we perceive the existing gender order as a contingent social interpretation of an equally contingent and ideologically structured reading of biology, which hinders subjective autonomy and self-realisation as well as democratic social co-existence, *then* gender mainstreaming has the potential to be something else: An important tool for a re-forging of gender as one of the many subjective identities which express a multiplicity of possible interpretations and subject positions within a plural self, that will not have any-more to become unitary and well-defined under a specific (one of two) gender identities, rendered single by the social order. The above, while in the short term it can fight gender inequality in all areas, promoting respective measures as emergency interventions that combat symptoms to be substantially eradicated via long term policies. The conceptual clarification of *gender* becomes thus a priority in view of the application of gender policies that go to the roots of gender referent inequality, a task that has to be undertaken by all those specialists that contribute to the formulation and thus influence EU policy out-put. The basic idea, which in my view should guide such an endeavour, can be summarised in the point that if it is accepted what was argued above concerning the dual character of «women's difference», as part of our actual everyday life of profoundly unequal gender relations *and* as an ideological mystification of the dominant gender regime that functions in favour of its legitimisation, then one has to admit that it is impossible to fight against the former based on the latter.

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