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“When they ask who will do it – be courageous and raise your hand”

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When I am asked how come all that occurred in my professional life, I usually say that I was at the right moment in the right place. I have never had any plan. Still, it is not the whole truth. I was also courageous enough to raise the hand when the question “who can do it” was asked. I showed the willingness to face new tasks and I was prepared to do it.

I had a good public education, very comprehensive, with Latin and classic Greek, and with languages. I studied at the University where I had not only mainstream western economics, but also sociology, history, math and econometrics, macro and micro approaches, foreign languages. I was also a Fulbright scholar. Besides I spent many years working at the University and left it partially when we decided to move Poland to democracy and market economy, and when I joined the government. I did not think I could ever enter politics. So, indeed in this miraculous moment, when Poland woke up, I was ready with all the knowledge needed to contribute to changing Poland. Knowing at that time all the questions to ask and joining others in search of answers.

In those fascinating times I worked in many governments, spent three years running the UN Economic Commission for Europe in Geneva, as deputy minister for industry and trade introduced the first in the Central Easter Europe policy for small and medium sized companies, as chief negotiator brought Poland to the OECD and then embarked on the mission to prepare Poland for the accession to the European Union. The latter took us ten years from the moment of applying for membership to the moment of becoming a full-fledged member of the Union. And I represented Polish government in the European Constitutional Convention, was the first and

second Polish Commissioner and, finally, since 2009 I have been three times elected in Warsaw as Member of the European Parliament.

15 years ago, with a group of like-minded Polish women we established Congress of Women and we convened its shadow cabinet, where I have the honor of being the Prime Minister. In the good times, when we had democratic government, we were regularly meeting the Prime Minister to share our opinions and expectations. We hope to go back to this tradition rather soon. As you probably know we, the democratic opposition, has just won the elections.

But the potential women represented in my home country is still only partially „used”. I continue to believe that increasing the number of women in political decisions making bodies is fundamental. Leaving this change to slowly move political and social processes without a legal support means waiting long time which we do not have. There are things to be done. All the available research shows that without a strong legal framework it would take between 100 and 300 years to achieve global gender equality.

Experience shows that when good women enter the politics, they understand it in a holistic, interconnected way. The fashionable word „carrier” is changing its meaning. More and more young women tend to talk about working for a common good, making out of it their personal aspirations. But we have also learned that we need a critical mass of women’s presence to change the rules of the game.

Today, I am a member of the European Parliament which is the main political institution in Europe pushing for women rights and gender equality. We see those rights as an inseparable part of human rights. I believe we still need more women here and I hope in the first European elections of Moldova there will be many women as winners. In 1979 we had the first direct elections to the European Parliament which brought 15,2% of women, now there are 39,3%. You have 40%. We need you.

We in the Parliament are especially sensitive to this issue, for we are the one elected body in the EU, representing all the citizens EU-wide. And 51 % of those citizens are women. Gender equality is a core value and objective in the EU's founding Treaties

and Charter of Fundamental, which gives them a special political weight in all the institutions, including the Parliament.

The European Parliament has made progress in increasing women's representation over the years and has a dedicated committee responsible for women's rights and gender equality, which is actively involved in shaping policies and legislation related to gender equality. The committee's composition, with only 4 out of 36 members being men, underscores its focus on women's rights. The EP has seen women holding influential positions, including 7 out of 14 Vice-Presidents, the EP President. Sadly, only 7 out of 23 parliamentary committees have women as a Chair.

Throughout the years the European Parliament has passed a series of laws and directives aimed at advancing women's rights. We have extensive legislation on equality, equal treatment in employment, guaranteed rights to maternity, paternity, parental and careers' leave and protection for victims of trafficking and crime.

In March 2023, the EP passed the Directive on Equal pay for equal work between men and women, that requires EU companies to disclose information to make it easier for employees to compare wages and disclose existing gender pay gaps. Year before that the EP passed Directive on Gender balance among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges in order to ensure gender balance on company boards.

Women rights and gender equality are also topic for structured dialogues between the Parliament and the Commission. In 2023 EP agreed to join the Istanbul Convention, which addresses gender-based violence. It is the first instrument in Europe to set legally binding standards specifically to prevent gender-based violence, protect victims of violence and punish perpetrators.

The European Parliament, along with its committees and delegations, hosts discussions and public hearings during European Gender Equality Week, addressing critical gender-related issues. This year it will take place on October 23-26, 2023.

Gender equality is also addressed in the NextGenerationEU program worth EUR 750 billion. In particular, national recovery and resilience plans should set out how the

investments and reforms financed by the Recovery and Resilience Facility are expected to contribute to promoting gender equality and equal opportunities for all.

All these instruments, programs and actions form a comprehensive legislative agenda concerning women rights and gender equality. The EU is a key actor globally for making women rights an inseparable part of human rights in the world. Underlining this is especially important in countries that tend toward authoritarian practices, where women are first to suffer.

Interventions of the EP, in form of resolutions, in defense of women in other parts of the world, against terrible acts, like genital mutilation are part of its public role in international area. The EP acts then as an agent for social change.

I can say with conviction that presence of women in political institutions modernizes the image of politics. Their collective wisdom is a driving force in our pivot to a new world. They can bring down the era of autocratic populism, demagoguery and geostrategic polarization. We need a strong presence of women in politics not as an accidental event from time to time but as a well-established trend, so that we don't have to start from scratch with every new political cycle. Unfortunately, the reality is that without women in leadership positions there is little hope for equality.

In the European Parliament we have not only environment open to equality, but we also have a powerful legislation tool, we have the power to influence international trade agreements to give hope to millions of women in the world. Unfortunately, not all political families demonstrate the same level of sensitivity to gender equality issue. I can also tell you that anti female attitudes form part of cross-cultural commonalities, and they are strongly present in people's minds. Voters question our competences more often than those of men.

That is why education continues to be crucial. Networking of women is crucial. Courage to raise the hand is crucial. Speaking in an assertive manner helps. Gender equality is a public good.