



Feministiskt initiativ

## **Election Platform of the Feminist Initiative for the Elections to the European Parliament 2009**

*The elections to the European Parliament are to be seen in the light of the great inequalities that exist between women and men, in Europe and throughout the world. Men own 99 per cent of all assets and receive 90 per cent of all income, in spite of the fact that more than half of the world's population are women and that they do two thirds of all the work.*

During the 20th century most formal and legal obstacles to gender equality were removed. Women's struggles resulted in the right to vote, greater participation in political life and social reforms that facilitated employment outside the home. Yet the same patriarchal structures characterize all European countries as they do the rest of the world. Women are mainly responsible for the care of children, the aged and the sick. In the world of politics, science and business men are in the majority, while women's contributions are rewarded with lower levels of pay and fewer opportunities of promotion. Women have to live in fear of men's violence and are reduced to sexual objects in advertising and the media. Sexual slavery, trafficking and prostitution are experienced daily by many women. The patriarchal structures that underpin these conditions go hand in hand with racist structures, the discrimination of homosexual, bisexual and transgendered persons and a view of life where heterosexuality is taken for granted.

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The same is true of Swedish society. Even if an increasing number of people have become aware of gender power structures and efforts to achieve equal opportunities have had some success, women still earn less than men and (patriarchal) violence against women is on the increase.

The launching of the Feminist Initiative and our participation in the Swedish elections in 2006 attracted attention from feminists all over the world. Now we are taking the next step towards establishing feminism as the starting point for political action and parliamentary representation.

The EU needs policies to strengthen women's rights and to prevent all forms of discrimination. Sex, class, ethnicity, sexuality or degree of disability should never be a reason for differential treatment. If we are to reach this goal, we need more feminists in Brussels and more distinct feminist voices in the European Parliament.

In the institutions of the EU male dominance is compact. Less than one third of the Parliament consists of women, yet the need is great for other voices and other perspectives than those that prevail when white, heterosexual men alone establish what is the norm. We are needed in European politics because the political agenda can only be changed if more feminists, whether they be women or men, gain political power in the Union.

In Sweden there are many politicians who call themselves feminists and political parties that describe themselves as feminist. The difference between the Feminist Initiative and other parties is that feminism for us is not only yet another significant perspective to be added to an already formulated political dimension such as socialism, liberalism or a green ideology. We chose instead to put feminism first and allow it to inspire our policies. Thus we are not restricted in our political task of furthering gender equality and non-discrimination by loyalty to ideologies formulated by men several generations ago.

With feminism as our point of departure we can also more clearly perceive the adverse circumstances that explain why individuals that make up half of humanity are being discriminated against because of their sex. When we survey Europe from a feminist point of view we see:

- ... how a common European security policy neither involves nor protects women, either in military conflicts or in everyday life. Women's bodies are systematically violated during military actions and along the path of social disintegration. Every year more women die on account of male domestic violence than through armed conflicts.
- ... how religious fundamentalism, extreme right wing forces and patriarchal norms are gaining ground, with demands for restricted rights to abortion and continued discrimination of homosexual, bisexual and transgendered persons. Women are placed on pedestals in the name of the sacred family, at the same time as they are denied civil and human rights.
- ... how the lack of publicly run, reasonably priced child care results in women's financial dependence on men and in solutions unsatisfactory to both parents and children.
- ... how the labour market is being deregulated and the influence of trade unions is on the decline. The Swedish model wavers in the clash with EU directives on privatisation, deregulation and the demands of the Bolkestein directive for freedom to establish business in increasingly wider areas. Women are at the bottom of the labour market hierarchy and pay the price in the form of insecurity and a heavy work burden. At the same time the debate on these issues often conveys racist tendencies and arguments.
- ... how EU-member states more openly than ever exploit the work force from countries outside the EU. This includes legal forms of employment such as guest worker systems, but also illegal migrant workers employed more or less overtly, who are treated as second class citizens. We see how women from all over the world are exploited in insecure domestic employment and in the brutal slave trade for sexual purposes.
- ... how climate issues are subordinated to short-sighted growth objectives, formulated almost exclusively by all-male groups and how traditional technical solutions for the future of society and the transference of responsibility to developing countries stand in the way of longterm sustainable development. The life style of the western world where men answer for the greater part of climate negative activity undermines living conditions for billions of women and men.

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The Feminist Initiative has elaborated a comprehensive plan of action for Europe in the document *A Feminist Politics for the European Union*. Here are some of the issues we intend to pursue in the European Parliament:

**The right to abortion must be recognized as a human right.** In many member states the right to abortion is restricted under the pressure from fundamentalist and religious forces. Human rights hold an important position within the EU. It is time to start regarding the right to decide over one's own body as a self-evident human right.

**Active efforts to achieve gender equality.** Establish an EU Commissioner for gender equality and one for anti-discrimination. Analyse the annual EU budget thoroughly from an equal rights perspective. Give gender equality issues status and priority in Parliament.

**Expansion of pre-schools and child care in the entire Union.** Limited access to these amenities and the idea of the man as the family provider are serious obstacles to achieving equality between the sexes as well to promoting economic development in most EU member countries. A number one priority should be the provision of child care for 90% of all children in the EU.

**An end to sex slavery.** Intensify efforts to abolish trafficking with women and children for sexual purposes and other forms of prostitution. Investigate how legalising prostitution in many EU countries affects the trade in sex slaves. Export Swedish legislation on prohibition of buying sexual services to the rest of Europe. Focus on male demand as the main cause of the sex trade and prostitution.

**Gender equal representation within the whole EU organisation.** All member countries and all institutions should be instructed to implement programmes designed to bring to an end the unequal representation of women and minorities.

**Focus on men's violence against women.** Violence against women is the greatest security problem in Europe and represents a systematic violation of human rights. By raising the issue to top political level the EU can contribute towards progress being made in many member countries. Analyse and account for the actual costs this issue imposes on society throughout the Union.

**Respect the right to asylum.** Remove the unreasonable obstacles that prevent people from seeking refuge in Europe. Abolish the strict visa demands and carrier liability that forces air companies and others to stop people from seeking asylum.

**A secularised EU where church and state are entirely separate.** It is not feasible that churches and other religious organisations are given a special position in the proposal for a new constitution, the Lisbon Treaty. The Catholic Church and other forces with a conservative position on family issues should not be offered a VIP lane in politics.

**An end to the militarisation of the EU.** The plans put forward in the Lisbon Treaty to create a defence alliance and a common army and to require military rearmament must be halted. The countries of Europe should contribute towards peace in the world by means of diversity, solidarity and diplomacy – not through military alliances and weapon programmes.

**Gender conscious climate policies.** The huge inequalities that exist in the world have provided a small group of men with power and control over the economy and over politics. Their decisions result in overconsumption and an unsustainable discharge of green house gases – wealthy men being responsible for a disproportionate share. Climate policies of the EU must rest on both global solidarity as well as on equal rights and a fair distribution of assets in member countries.