



Event report: “Liberalism and Gender Equality – Crafting New Policies 2018”

Madrid, Spain 20181108-20181110

The event was organized by the European Liberal Forum (ELF) and the Swedish International Liberal Centre (SILC) with the support of Latvijas Nākotnes Forums. This report is written by the event organizers at SILC.

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1. Summary

The seminar took place at the Marriott Auditorium Hotel and Conference Center, in the outskirts of Madrid and gathered 21 participants from 9 different countries. The focus of the seminar was to encourage liberal policies promoting gender equality, through a mix of sharing the experiences among the participants, as well as inspiring expert input and best-practices from a broad setup of speakers and panelists.

As the seminar took place during the ALDE Party Congress, it offered the participants good opportunities for networking with other liberals attending the congress and deepening their relationships within the European liberal family, as well as sharing the content of the seminar and discuss liberal gender equality policy with a wider audience.

The seminar met the overall objective of strengthening the capacity of liberal parties in working for gender equality. Evaluations show participants liked the event in general (4,45/5, n=20) and that they will follow up what they have learned by taking concrete actions when they came home (4,5/5, n=20). A common reaction from participants was that the content was unusually concrete, offering clear examples on what can be done. We interpret this feedback as a sign of that we have accomplished what we set out to achieve.

2. Event objective and layout

All sessions had in common that they aimed at encouraging liberal policies for gender equality. The event touched on several different aspects adhering to both equal representation and policy areas including; gender equality on the local political level, strategies of defending secularism and answering to religious conservative opposition that we as liberals cannot disregard when striving towards equality.

The three day seminar gathered 21 participants from 9 different countries. The participants represented liberal parties and organizations that are current partners to SILC or in other ways friends within the liberal sphere.

The majority of the invited speakers and panelists attended the seminar in accordance with the schedule. However, the invited speaker Juno Blom, Member of Parliament of Sweden for Liberalerna, was unfortunately not able to attend the “Honour Culture and Liberal Response” session. Luckily however, Gulan Avci, MP and Chairperson of Liberal Women in Sweden, were able to speak in her place. On the last day a panel consisting of Juli Minoves, the President of Liberal International, Angelika



Mlinar and Annelou van Egmond, both members of the ALDE Bureau, rounded off the event with reflections what can be expected from liberal parties in terms of gender equality work. The program also included a panel with participants from Sweden and Ukraine giving different examples on how inequality can be addressed in local politics.

The program was designed to maximize the participation of the delegates and devote time for discussion. All delegates represented had been requested to prepare and deliver a presentation on how to answer to religious conservative opposition to gender equality in their countries and how to defend secularism. A considerable amount of time was also dedicated for group work during the Resolution Workshop which aimed at defining the minimum requirements for liberal parties in terms of gender equality work. This session ended up being the most liked by the participants (4,63/5, n=19).

The seminar took place at the same time as the ALDE Party Congress in the Marriott Auditorium Hotel and Conference Center, and with Madrid city center approximately 30–45 minutes away with a taxi, most participants remained at the hotel and conference grounds. This allowed for endless opportunities for informal chats and meetings between participants and other liberals attending the congress.

3. Highlights

The three day seminar was packed with interesting sessions and gave the participants opportunity to have interesting discussions, which involved putting forward ideas, viewpoints and responses to current gender equality issues. Worth noting was that all official ELF-event sessions scored higher than 4/5 in the evaluations, while the optional ALDE-related activities rated lower. Based on the evaluations and our observations, the following sessions could be viewed as the highlights of the event.

The session on honor culture and honor-based violence by Gulan Avci (scored 4,47/5, n=19) was one of the most highly rated parts of the program. Gulan gave a personal account of the situation in Sweden, where decades of migration from the Middle East have created new challenges, where especially young women and LGBT-people are controlled and oppressed by their families and refused the freedom to be who they want. Gulan's message was that liberals must defend the rights of society's weak – and not be afraid of being called racists while doing so.

The panel on gender equality in local politics (4,59/5, n=17) presented examples on what the Liberals do for equality in local councils in Sweden, offered by Ulrika Landergren and Maria Nilsson, as well as in Ukraine, represented by Olga Nemanzhyna. Olga who is head of the Council of Women's Initiatives within the liberal party Power of People in Ukraine, explained among other things how the step to enter politics sometimes is to big for women, why other civil society activities can act as a bridge initially. From Sweden the participants were given concrete policy examples such as feminist snow-plowing, street light campaigns and equality in local sports and leisure budgeting.

The most popular session (4,63/5, n=19) was the Resolution Workshop on minimum requirements for liberal parties gender equality work, chaired by SILC Secretary-General Martin Ängeby. Participants were divided into 4 groups and given time to define what can be expected from liberal parties in terms of gender equality within areas such as healthcare, political participation, education and sexual violence. After long and loud debates, the groups presented their results. The morning after, a synopsis of the conclusions was presented with the presence of two members of the ALDE Bureau and the president of Liberal International. The exercise was popular among the participants and many



afterwards requested to have the result sent to them, so that it could be used for benchmarking when developing their own party programs.

One important purpose with the resolution workshop was to open the perspectives of the participants to gender mainstreaming of all policies, not only equal participation in politics. In order to achieve this, the Welcome Session (4,32/5, n=19) where Carl Hedman from SILC presented the legal situation and adopted reforms in countries represented, lay an important foundation.

4. Results and reflections

Altogether, the seminar met the high set expectations and all sessions served towards the purpose of encouraging liberal policies for gender equality. As organizers, we were delighted to confirm that our two chosen themes of the event, gender equality in local politics and the defense of secularism, were well received and caught the attention and interest by the participants.

The event had a good mix of invited speakers and interactive sessions, involving the participants more directly. Overall it was positive to see that, despite a tight program, few signs of fatigue could be seen within the group, that instead kept participating actively throughout the three days. The positive remark from the participants that the program content was more concrete than other political seminars, is an analysis that we share and count as a part of the success.

Apart from the usual learning outcomes, a concrete result from the event is a draft of a resolution for minimum requirements for liberal parties in terms of gender equality. This can be elaborated and possibly be submitted to future ALDE or LI congresses, but to the very least it will work as an inspiring document for the participants in their future party work.

SILC has a strict policy when it comes to equal participation in all events we organize. The seminar did adequately reflect this commitment as 11 women and 10 men participated in the seminar. In terms of invited speakers, panelists and moderators 55% were women and 45% were men. It is an important message that gender equality does not become a women's issue, therefore also including men speaking on events like this is worth a reminder for future reference.

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