

## **Report of meeting in Turkey December 10 and 11 2009**

The Turkish Association of University Women held a very successful meeting in Ankara, Turkey in December on the subject of Implementing Gender Equality in Eastern Europe and the CIS. It was a well attended meeting with participants from Latvia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Norway, Finland, Turkish Cyprus, Netherlands and the UK, as well as many members from all parts of Turkey. The session in the parliament on the second day was attended by several male members of parliament, which was gratifying.

The meeting was to celebrate the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first demonstration of Turkish Women for independence in the country; the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women gaining the right to vote and be elected in Turkey; the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Turkish Association of University Women and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Ankara branch.

The first session was on Women in Decision-making Positions. The position of Women in Business was not very encouraging, lower numbers of women than in other European countries, few in factory management, though more in marketing. Things were getting better in financial institutions. There was a tendency to retreat to the home after the age of 35. The speaker from Latvia was the head of the institute to unite all NGO activity in Latvia and is being very energetic in uniting women to work together on successful strategies on family/work reconciliation and co-operation with government. The male professor from Oslo, who had Turkish connections brought his son along because the son said that the conventions on behaviour in his school in Turkey were almost entirely directed at the girls. They had to dress respectably and their skirts had to be of a length where the boys could not see up them when the girls were ahead of them on the stairs! Girls' behaviour was controlled, not boys'. The professor said that a survey on violence against women in Turkey showed that there was less violence in communities where women did not wear the veil.

In the Women Conceiving the Future session women from different industries and workplaces talked about what things were like in their employment. IT seems to be less restrictive than some industries (in Turkey, anyway).

The second day was the Women in Politics session. We had a very interesting presentation from the woman from Uzbekistan about what had happened since the end of the Soviet system. There had been an unveiling campaign in central Asia since 1928. The proportion of women in representative bodies, albeit not in major decision-making positions, had been 27%-41% but this was lost in the 1990s. It is creeping back up and there is now positive gender equality legislation. Women are doing well in universities and Kyrgyzstan has 25.6 women in parliament now. There were several Turkish members of Parliament with varying views on how women were doing and what they should do; how anti women the culture was, whether women should be very feminist oriented, or whether they didn't support each other, took offence easily and voted for men! The wife of the President of Northern Cyprus made a speech complimenting Turkey on its achievements. There was an emphasis from almost all that international conventions and rights should be implemented.

This was a very interesting and enjoyable meeting. I met lots of very pleasant and interesting women and there was plenty to discuss with them. The Turkish federation and the President, Birten Gokyay are to be congratulated and thanked for the successful result of all their hard work.

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