



**BPW Europe**

Business and Professional Women



## “ BPW Estonia International conference “Estonia's Unrealised Opportunity” on 09.11.2012

In addition, BPW Estonia hosted an international conference, “Estonia's Unrealized Opportunity” on 9 November 2012.

“BPW Estonia took the opportunity to host an international conference because we wanted to investigate whether the gender balance of women and men in society affects the livelihood of individuals, businesses and the State.

“We were inspired to organize this conference after researching the successes and failures of gender balance in neighboring countries.

“As a leading women's organization , we wish to begin a knowledgeable discussion in order to find “Estonia's path” and the hidden opportunities of gender balance for our own lives, our businesses and in the organization of State affairs.

“We have seen and lived through all the changes that have taken place in our country and society, it seems only fitting to be part of the solution by opening up untapped opportunities for women and men,” adds Ms Ruul.

International conference “Estonia's Unrealized Opportunity” on 9 November 2012 took place on the M/S Victoria and was an even more important milestone! Four political parties presented in the Estonian Parliament signed the common Memorandum together with BPW Estonia for the zip model for the election lists of candidates. Municipal elections will be next year and elections to the Parliament in 2014. The zip model means that there will always be one man, one woman, one man, one woman and they will be admitted to the office and Parliament in the same order.

The Conference consisted of three modules and the target audience was active and open minded men and women from business, politics, public sector and educational institutions who are interested in expanding their horizons and knowledge base in the discussion on Estonia's opportunities for the future.

First Module - Gender equality, the benefits to business and society, was opened by Rait Maruste, Head of Constitutional Committee. Rait Maruste spoke about Gender Equality as a Necessary Subject for Estonia. Julia Laffranque, European Human Rights Court Judge opened the subject of Women and the European Legal System. And Eirik Nestås Mathisen, Deputy Head of Mission at the Norwegian Embassy in Estonia analyzed Gender Equality as an Opportunity for Estonia.

Second Module - Women in leadership – European success stories and failures – was lead by lectors from countries with highly developed rate of women in leadership.

Norway – Gunvor Eldegard, Member of Parliament, Norway

Switzerland – Sabine Schmelzer, Europe Region Co-ordinator, BPW International

Island – Hildur Jonsdottir, Advisor to the Prime Minister of Island

Denmark – Drude Dahlerup, Professor Emeritus, Stockholm University

Finland – Tuulikki Juusela, Chairman of the Board, Womco Ltd.

Third Module – What is the opinion regarding the inclusion of women in the management process – was lead by men. Linnar Viik, Estonian Info Technology and IT Visionary, Lecturer at Estonian Information Technology College, Chairman of the Board of the Open Estonia Foundation, who spoke on the subject of possibility of Equality leading to new values and Meelis Virkebau, Vice-Chairman of the Estonian Employers` Confederation, Chairman of the Estonian Clothing and Textile, who by his own experience opened the subject of Leading Women vs Women and Leadership.

The conference ended with the signing of the common Memorandum by four political parties presented in the Estonian Parliament together with BPW Estonia for the zip model for the election lists of candidates.



## “ Memorandum signed by Estonian major political parties on the BPW Estonia International Conference 09.11.2012

BPW Estonia International conference “Estonia's Unrealized Opportunity” was one part of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations and took place on 9 November 2012 on the M/S Victoria and was an even more important milestone! Four political parties represented in the Estonian Parliament signed the common Memorandum together with BPW Estonia for the zip model for the election lists of candidates. Municipal elections will be next year and elections to the Parliament in 2014. The zip model means that there will always be one man, one woman, one man, one woman and they will be admitted to the office and Parliament in the same order.

### **Memorandum of Cooperation 9 November 2012**

The purpose of this Memorandum of Cooperation is to alert the general public in Estonia to the under-representation of women in top management positions in public and private sector organizations and to highlight the importance of gender diversity in politics and the economy as a tool for improved political decision-making and better corporate governance amid a challenging economic environment. International research has shown that greater gender balance in key decision-making positions leads to more diversified leadership behaviors, less conflict and more sustainable solutions.

The report “Women in political decision making - quality and equality” presented in the European Parliament on 3 October 2012 points out that women are less visible and less represented during election campaigns. It is proposed that all European Union member states introduce the principle of gender parity on electoral lists to improve the situation. Viviane Reding, Vice-President of the European Commission, has repeatedly emphasized the need to reinforce the gender focus in the elaboration of the EU's growth strategy Europe 2020.

Women's representation in national parliaments in the EU has increased from 16% in 1997 to 24% in 2009, with women accounting for 27 % of government ministers in EU member states. This is still below the critical mass of at least 30% women to make a significant and meaningful impact on political decision-making.

Serving as role models are our neighbors - the Nordic countries which enjoy the highest levels women's representation in national parliaments: 44.7% in Sweden, 42.5% in Finland, 39.6% in Norway, 39.7% in Iceland, and 39.1% in Denmark. There are a range of factors behind women's top-level political participation such as running public awareness campaigns, promoting women's empowerment, challenging gender stereotypes, applying social measures and introducing gender quota.

In Estonia, women hold currently 19.8% of the seats in the Parliament (Riigikogu), 29.6% of the seats in municipal councils; there is just one woman government minister. We are confident that a more equal representation of women and men on political parties' electoral lists, concerning both parliamentary as well as local elections, would provide equal opportunities for men and women to run for elected office.

**We are confident that the use of the so-called zipper system which requires alternation between one male and one female candidate at the top of party candidate lists at the elections will become good practice to be applied across political parties at the next local and parliamentary elections.**

By signing this Memorandum of Cooperation we would like to communicate the message that women's increased involvement in political and economic decision-making is necessary and that it will translate into gains for each and every organization and our society generally.

Signed by BPW Estonia, Estonian Reform Party, Estonian Centre Party, Pro Patria and Res Publica Union, Estonian Social Democratic Party “