



Brussels, 3 March 2009

## **FLASH EB 266 WOMEN AND EUROPEAN ELECTIONS**

### **- Summary analysis -**

On the eve of International Women's day and with the approaching European elections in June 2009, the European Parliament and the European Commission decided to carry out an in-depth study on female voters.

The aim of this EB Flash survey, conducted mainly by telephone on a sample of more than 35,000 women and 5,500 men, was to discover the perception that women have of politics in general, on balancing work and personal life, their perception of the European Union, the role of the European Parliament, as well as their motivations when voting.

In the majority of answers, two characteristics are evident: large differences between Member States and a relatively high share of "Don't Know" answers which is similar to the socio-demographic analysis of the Standard Eurobarometers conducted over 12 months<sup>1</sup>. The results of that study proved that women are more selective in their choice of priority policies to be defended by the EP.

#### **⇒ Politics - is it a man's world?**

A large majority of women but also a slightly lower majority of men believe that politics is dominated by men.

#### **⇒ A different way of doing politics?**

**Yes**, women in politics can bring an added value to the decision making process. This statement is confirmed by a large majority of respondents even if this majority share is bigger amongst women than amongst men.

#### **⇒ Discrimination or not?**

A large majority of women do not feel discriminated because of their gender but the share of women who report having felt discriminated differs largely between Member States, even up to 20 percentage points.

If gender discrimination is reported, it is felt equally at work or in society in general.

#### **⇒ Difficulties in achieving a work/life balance?**

A majority of women in all countries report no difficulties.

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<sup>1</sup> From March 2008 (EB68) to March 2009 (EB70)

⇒ **Why some women do not work?**

Respondents, who are currently not employed, were given the choice of a list of possible answers and cited family obligations as the principal reason for not working. The second main reason is that they are actually looking for employment and thirdly for personal reasons.

There are large differences noted between age groups regarding these reasons.

⇒ **Does the EU defend the interests of women?**

- When questioned as women, the majority of women state that their interests are not well represented by the EU, but a strong minority think the opposite.
- Again, large differences between Member States of up to 40 percentage points are evident from the results.

⇒ **Do the activities of the EP have an impact on life in general?**

An important share of women responds in the affirmative to this question, especially as regards education and women's rights.

⇒ **How should the EP promote gender equality in family life?**

The EP should act in a number of ways: by including years of childminding as pensionable years, assuring the provision of sufficient day care facilities for children, securing the shared custody of children in divorce cases as well as securing a minimum length of parental leave.

⇒ **How should the next Parliament promote gender equality in general?**

According to respondents, the Parliament should give priority to the issue of equal pay for both genders and to the fight against violence and women trafficking. These two options were chosen most often by women and men although the share is slightly lower for men.

Paradoxically the promotion of equal employment opportunities which comes third is more often cited by men than by women.

⇒ **How to overcome the gender pay gap?**

- In order of preference: by providing more information on the existing laws, by adopting new legislation or by reinforcing the existing laws.

⇒ **How do they choose a candidate? When do they decide? What should be the proportion of male/female members in the EP?**

- When choosing a candidate in the European elections, women attribute most importance to experience on European issues. With an 8% lower share of answers, always voting for the same party comes second.
- One quarter of women say they decided for whom to vote for two months or more before the elections, compared to 32% of men who do the same. Less than 15% of women and men decide at the last moment.
- A large majority of women and slightly less men believe that the share of female members in the EP should reach or exceed 50% but the differences between Member States can vary up to 40%. Only a small number of women and men support obligatory quotas.

The analysis of the results of this survey, as for the the sociodemographic study conducted by the EP which is published in parallel with this Flash, shows concrete differences in the responses between men and women. However, even though the participation of women was lower until the last elections, the elections of 2004 have shown that male/female participation is practically the same.

## I. WOMEN'S PERCEPTION OF POLITICS

### A. Is politics dominated by men?

Respondents were asked if they agree with the statement that politics is dominated by men:

- **45% of women (totally agree) think that politics is dominated by men** against only 40% men.
- A further 32% of women somewhat agree with this statement as opposed to 31% of men.
- Only 9% of women totally disagree with this statement (versus 14% of men).

⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:

- When adding "totally agree" and "somewhat agree" answers, **a majority of women in all Member States agree with this statement**. Men are less likely to agree than women.
- Women in the Czech Republic (89%), Poland (84%) and Portugal (83%) are the most convinced about male domination in politics. They are least in Finland: 51%, Malta: 62% and the Netherlands: 66%).

### B. Do women bring "added value" to decision making?

Respondents were asked if they agree with the statement that women in politics add a viewpoint which could lead to different decision making in general and the results show:

- that **83% of women and 76% of men agree that women can bring a different perspective to politics** (sum of "totally" and "somewhat agree" responses).
- Still, the difference in the degree of conviction amongst genders is obvious as 52% of women totally agree with the statement against only 45% of men.
- On the opposite side of the scale, gender difference is also obvious: 6% of women vs. 11% of men totally disagree with the "added value" of women in decision making.

When adding the answers "totally agree" and "somewhat agree":

- The countries where most women agree with the proposed statement are France (89%), Portugal (91%) and Sweden (83%).
- The lowest level of agreement (although a majority of female respondents still agree with this statement) is recorded in Poland (70%), Latvia (77%) and Lithuania (79%).

## II. WOMEN AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION

### A. Experience of discrimination:

This time, only women were asked if they ever felt treated unfairly because of their gender. If they answered positively, where did this happen (at work, at home or in society in general)?

- **A large majority (67%) of women say they have never felt treated unfairly because of their gender.**

- On average, **32% of women in Europe (EU27) indicate that they have been already discriminated against** on the basis of their gender.

⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:

- The highest share of women who report having been subject of gender discrimination is seen in Sweden (43%), Greece (40%) and Finland (38%).
- These shares are lowest in Malta and Portugal (22%), Hungary and the Netherlands (23%).

## **B. The context of this discrimination:**

Women who reported having felt unfairly treated on the basis of gender say:

- The experienced discrimination happened **at work** (58%) and in **society in general** 56% as opposed to discrimination on the basis of gender at home (13%).

⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:

Amongst women who reported experiences of gender discrimination, there are a large number of differences between Member States:

- Gender discrimination at work is more often reported by women in the Czech Republic (78% of reported cases), the UK (76%) and Ireland (68%).
- The highest incidence of unfair treatment in society on general is noted in Romania (65%), Portugal (64%) and in the UK (63%).
- Reports of discrimination on the grounds of gender at home, although rare, are the most frequent in the UK and Greece (both 21%) as well as in Spain and Ireland (17%).

## **III. WOMEN AND WORK LIFE**

### **A. Balancing personal and work life**

This is one of the questions that was posed only to female respondents:

⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:

- **Seven out of 10 women in the EU say they can achieve the correct work-life balance;** ranging from 57% in Greece to 84% in the Netherlands.
- The problem of having their working lives hindered by the demands of their personal lives was most strongly reported by women in Greece (32%), France (26%) and Slovakia (25%).
- On the other hand, the share of women who say that their working life is hindered by the demands of their personal life is on average very low (8%) but is highest in Slovenia (21%), the Czech Republic (15%) and Cyprus (14%).

### **B. Reasons for not working:**

Only women who are currently not employed (excluding retired and full time students) were questioned about their situation.

- Looking at the EU average, **the biggest share of women (32%) say that they are staying at home because of their family responsibilities.**
- The second most cited reason (23%) is that they are **currently looking for employment.**
- 20% of women in the EU say that it is their **personal choice.**

⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:

Staying at home due to family responsibilities is given as a reason for not working by only 3% of respondents in Sweden against 51% of respondents in Malta.

## IV. WOMEN AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

### A. The representation of women's interests by the EU:

This question was only asked to women. They evaluated this on a 4-point scale and after adding "very well represented" and "fairly well represented" answers on the one hand and "not really well" and "not at all well represented" on the other, the results are as follows:

- On average in the EU, **39% of women feel that their interests are represented by the EU** ("very well represented" and "fairly well represented"), versus **46% of women who believe that they are not and 16% who do not know.**

⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:

- Women in Luxembourg are most satisfied by the way their interests are represented by the EU (66%), similar to the Netherlands (56%) and Denmark (55%).
- The least satisfaction with the representation of their interest is expressed by women in Latvia (20%), Bulgaria (23%) and Hungary (23%).
- The share of "don't know" answers is highest in Sweden (33%), Estonia (31%) and the Netherlands (25%).

### B. Impact of the EP on life in general:

Do women think that the EP has an impact on their life in general? From a list of items which were proposed, the results at an EU level show that:

- **Women believe that the activities of the European parliament have most impact on education** (13% answered "high impact" plus another 31% believe this impact is moderate, together 44%).
- **Similar answers are given for the impact of the EP on their rights as women** (9% say the impact is high, 35% say it is moderate, together 44%).
- Women think that the EP has slightly less but still some impact on their **welfare and working life** (41% evaluate the impact as important or moderate).
- The lowest impact the EP has on women's **family life** (34% for "high" and "moderate").

⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:

The analysis shows large differences.

- In Austria, Luxembourg, Denmark and Germany women think that the activities of the EP have most impact on all the mentioned domains of their life.
- It is the opposite in Bulgaria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Latvia and Lithuania.

### C. Priority policies of the EP: family life

Both men and women were asked to choose one priority area from a list of gender equality policies. Amongst family related issues, which should be prioritised by the next European parliament?

- Women focus on **childcare related policies**. They think that priority should be given to **measures allowing child-minding years to count towards a pension** (32%), followed closely by the **provision of sufficient day-care facilities**.
- Men give more importance to the provision of childcare facilities (28%). They place measures allowing child-minding years to count towards a pension in second place (25%), and give almost the same importance to the securing of shared custody of children in divorce cases (24%).

⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:

- **Measures allowing child-minding years to count towards a pension:**
  - most important for women in Sweden (51%), Hungary (50%) and in Austria (49%).
  - least important in Cyprus (16%), in Denmark (18%) and in Portugal (20%)
- **Provision of sufficient day-care facilities for children:**
  - It appears to be the biggest priority for women in Portugal (49%), Greece (40%) and Cyprus (39%).
  - The **lowest** importance is given to it in Lithuania (13%), Sweden (15%) and Slovakia(20%).
- **Securing shared custody of children in divorce cases:**
  - The most importance is given to this issue in Spain (29%), Italy (27%), Ireland and Lithuania (26%).
  - The lowest shares of women who give it priority are in Hungary (8%), Lithuania and Germany (9%).
- **Securing a minimum length of parental leave:**
  - The most importance is given to this issue in the Czech Republic (20%), Bulgaria, Romania and Estonia (19%)
  - The smallest number of woman who consider it as a priority are can be seen in Hungary (5%), Italy (6%), Germany and Portugal (7%).

### D. Priority policies of the EP: gender equality in society in general

Amongst possible priorities in the domain of gender equality in general, respondents were once again given a choice of five questions which the next European Parliament should focus on.

- In the EU, on average, **women give priority to equal pay for men and women** (31%), followed by the **fight against violence and the trafficking** of women (27%) and **equal employment opportunities** (22%).
- On the whole, men give more or less the same priority to the fight against violence and women trafficking (27%), followed by equal pay for both genders and equal employment opportunities (26%).

⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:

- **Equal pay for men and women:**

- Such equality is considered as the principle priority by women in Austria (45%), Germany (43%), France and Sweden (42%).
- It is prioritized the least in Italy (11%), Romania (14%) and Greece (15%).

- **The fight against violence committed against women and the trafficking of women:**

- This is seen as the main priority in Spain (48%), Denmark (43%) and Portugal (38%).
- It is the lowest priority in Hungary (14%), Slovakia (16%), Poland and Estonia (16%).

- **Equal employment opportunities**

- This is the most important priority for women in Hungary (35%), Lithuania and the Czech Republic (31%).
- This is the least important in France and Sweden (13%) and Denmark (15%).

## V. EQUAL PAY

### A. Equal pay - how to achieve it?

All respondents, men and women, were asked how equal pay for men and women should be achieved.

- Both groups believe the most effective solution is providing **more information on the existing rights of women** although women choose this answer more often (41%) than men (37%).

⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:

- This theme is cited by the largest share of women in Romania (53%), Latvia (51%), Greece and Malta (50%)
- It is chosen by the smallest share of women in Czech Republic (30%), Poland, Hungary and Slovakia (32%).

- **New legislation** is the second most often chosen option (women: 26%, men: 27%)

⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:

- This is chosen as the most efficient solution by women in Hungary (39%), Poland (35%), Cyprus and Slovakia (32%).
- It is least often chosen in Malta (11%), Romania (20%) and Lithuania (21%).

- **Reinforcing existing laws** is in third place (women: 23%, men: 24%).

⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:

- This theme is seen as the most effective solution by women in the Czech Republic (30%), Finland (27%), Lithuania and Cyprus (26%);
- It is considered as the least efficient in Austria (15%) Romania and Slovenia (16%).

## B. Equal pay - on which level to act?

- Whatever the actions are the majority of both women and men (55% and 58% respectively) **prefer them to be taken at an EU level** rather than at a national level.

⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:

- Looking at women only, the highest preference for action at an EU level is found in Luxembourg (80%), Spain (74%), Portugal and Belgium (70%).
- However, women in the UK (62%), Romania (61%) and Malta (59%) prefer measures for reducing gender pay gap to be taken at a national level.

## VI. WOMEN AND ELECTIONS

### A. Elections in general: how to choose a candidate?

All respondents were firstly asked how they decide who to vote for in general whether in local, regional, national or European elections.

- The largest shares of respondents of both genders decide above all on the **basis of the campaign issues**: women: 37%, men: 41%.

Finland is the country where the difference between men and women is most notable (33% of women against 20% of men).

⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:

- Decision making was most important for the largest share of women in the United Kingdom (67%), Ireland (64%) and Sweden (51%).
- It was least important for women in Cyprus (12%), Greece (15%) and Bulgaria (17%).

- **Always voting for the same party** is the second most used strategy. 29% of women and 28% of men say that is how they choose a candidate.

⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:

- This is most cited for the largest proportion of women in Greece and Spain (42%) and Cyprus (41%)
- However for the smallest share of women in Latvia (14%), Ireland (15%), Slovakia and Lithuania (16%).

- The third most often cited element in deciding who to vote for is the **personality of the candidate**. This is slightly more important for women (25%) than for men (21%).

⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:

- The biggest shares of women who give this as the decisive element are seen in Lithuania (52%), Slovenia, Bulgaria and Slovakia (48%).
- The smallest shares of women with such an opinion are in the United Kingdom (7%), Sweden (10%) and the Netherlands (12%).

## B. Elections in general: when to decide?

Again, asking about elections in general, respondents were asked when they usually decide which candidate to vote for.

- 28% of women and 32% of men know who they will vote for **more than 2 months ahead of the elections.**

⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:

- This was chosen by 48% of female respondents in Greece, 47% in Spain and 38% in Malta
- However only by 8% of women in Finland, 12% in Ireland and 19% of women in Poland and Latvia.

- 10% of women (11% of men) make their mind up **1-2 months ahead of elections.**

- Approximately **one month before the elections** is given as the answer by 18% of women and 16% of men.

- In the **last two weeks and last week before the elections**, 24% of women and 22% of men say they decide for whom to vote for.

- 13% of women and 12% of men say they **decide at the last moment.**

⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:

- Respondents in Romania (18%), Malta and the Netherlands (17%) are most likely to decide at the last moment.
- This is least likely in Sweden and Denmark (6%), Lithuania and Austria (8%).

## C. European elections: how to choose a candidate?

Respondents were questioned on their specific reasons for choosing a candidate in the European Parliament elections. They were then given a list of possible reasons from which they could choose two responses in order of importance.

- **Experience on European issues** is the first choice.

This is the main decisive element both for women (39% of first choices, further 23% as second choice, together 62%) and for men (34% of first choices, further 23% as second choice, together 57%) but it is evident that women give it more importance.

⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:

- It is the most important in Cyprus (81%), Ireland, Finland and Malta (74%).
- It is least decisive but still very important in the Czech Republic (46%), Denmark, Lithuania and Sweden (52%).

- The second most important aspect is the candidate's **political orientation.**

This is more important for men than for women. It is the most important criterion by more men (34% as first choice, 21% as second, together 55%) than women (29% as first choice, 22% as second, together 51%).

⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:

- This is most important for women in Denmark (65%), Germany (64%) and Portugal (62%)
- The smallest number of responses in favour of this aspect is noted in Latvia (26%), Bulgaria (28%) and Slovenia (29%).

➤ **Visibility/familiarity** is the third most cited response

This is cited by 19% of women in total (8% of women consider this criteria as their first choice, 11% as their second). 17% of men give this aspect as their first choice response (7% as their first choice, 11% as their second choice).

➤ **Gender** of the candidate comes last.

It is only chosen by 5% of women (sum of both choices) and 3% of men.

⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:

- Gender is more important to respondents in Finland (17%), Denmark (16%), Belgium and the Netherlands (11%).
- It is least in Lithuania, Latvia, and France (2%) and in Portugal (1%).

#### **D. Female quota: what percentage of deputies in the Parliament should be women?**

- 48% of women and 39% of men think that at least half or even more of MEPs should be female.
- A further 22% of women and 21% of men would be satisfied with 40 to 49% of female representatives in the EP
- Once again, men (17%) are more likely not to give an answer to this question than women (11%).

⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:

A proportion of female deputies equal to or more than 50% is:

- most strongly demanded in Sweden (74%), Ireland (67%) and Portugal (62%)
- but is the least popular in Estonia (20%), the Czech republic (28%), Lithuania and Bulgaria (31%).

N.B. Countries with the lowest representation of women in national parliaments are mostly in the new Member States of the EU; these countries are also the ones where fewest women (and men) think that equal representation of women in the European Parliament should be the norm.

## E. Female quota: how to achieve a higher share of women in the EP?

After being told what the percentage of female members is in their national parliaments, both men and women were asked if and how this share should be increased (table of actual percentage of female members in national parliaments in Annex)

- Firstly, by **encouraging women to participate in politics**: 53% of women and 42% of men.
  - ⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:
    - This option was chosen by the largest number of women in Ireland (69%), Malta (67%), Luxembourg, the UK and Romania (65%).
    - But it is least popular in Estonia (31%), Latvia (37%) and Bulgaria (39%).
- Then by the **voluntary commitment of political parties**: 12% for women and 15% for men.

Even though it is the second most cited response, it is far less popular than the first choice.

- ⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:
  - This response is considered as the best option in Denmark (24%), Italy and Sweden (17%).
  - However, it is seen to be least effective by women in Lithuania and Romania (5%), Bulgaria and Slovenia (6%).

The option "**nothing has to be done, I do not agree to increase the proportion**" receives support from only 5% of women and 9% of men.

- ⇒ Differences of female responses between Member States:
  - The share of women who give this response is largest in the three Baltic countries (Lithuania and Estonia: 10%, Latvia: 11%).
  - It is lowest in Portugal (1%), Sweden, Ireland and Malta (3%).

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## ANNEXE 1

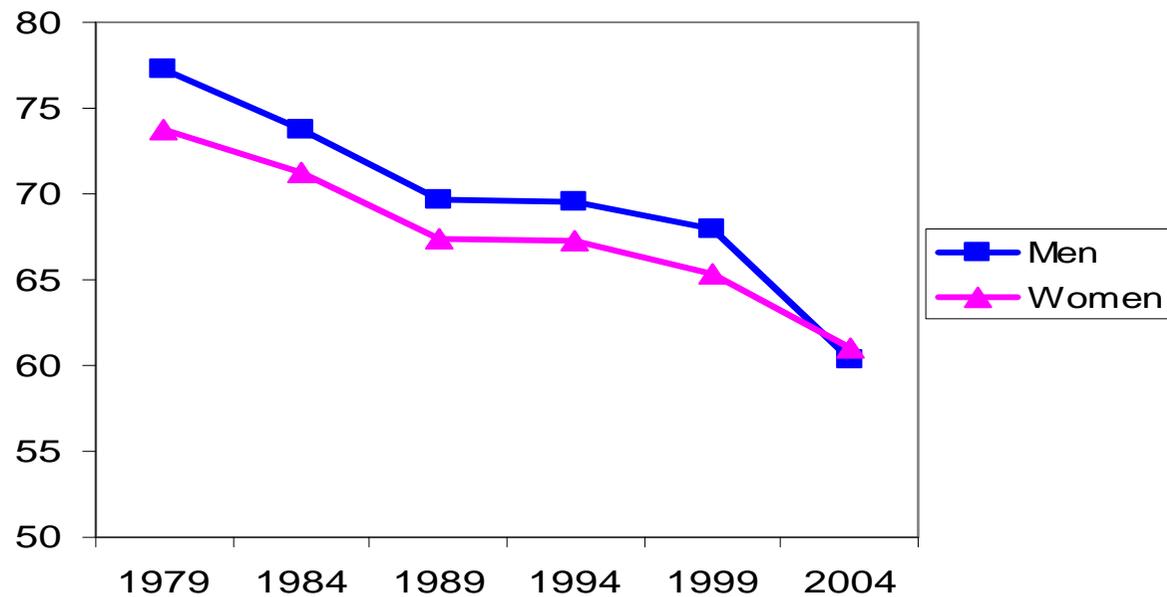
### Proportion of Women in the European Parliament since 1979 and in the current National Parliament by Member State

Country	EP 1979-1984 <sup>1</sup> %	EP 1984-1989 <sup>2</sup> %	EP 1989-1994 <sup>3</sup> %	EP 1994-1999 <sup>4</sup> %	EP 1999-2004 <sup>5</sup> %	EP 2004-2009 <sup>6</sup> %	Current National Parliament <sup>7</sup> %
BE	8,33	16,67	16,67	32	28	33,33	38
BG	-	-	-	-	-	44,44	21,7
CZ	-	-	-	-	-	20,83	16,5
DK	31,25	37,5	37,5	43,75	37,5	42,86	36,9
DE	14,81	19,75	30,86	35,35	37,37	33,33	32,2
EE	-	-	-	-	-	50	20,8
EL	-	8,33	4,16	16	16	29,17	16
ES	-	-	15	32,81	34,37	25,93	35,7
FR	22,22	20,99	23,46	29,89	40,23	44,87	18,5
IE	13,33	13,33	6,67	26,67	33,33	38,46	13,3
IT	13,58	9,88	12,35	12,64	11,49	20,51	21,3
CY	-	-	-	-	-	0	16,1
LV	-	-	-	-	-	22,22	22
LT	-	-	-	-	-	38,46	18,4
LU	16,67	50	50	50	33,33	50	23,3
HU	-	-	-	-	-	37,5	10,9
MT	-	-	-	-	-	0	8,7
NL	20	28	28	32,26	35,48	48,15	41,3
AT	-	-	-	-	38,1	27,78	28,4
PL	-	-	-	-	-	14,81	20,2
PT	-	-	12,5	8	20	25	40,2
RO	-	-	-	-	-	28,57	11,4
SI	-	-	-	-	-	42,86	13,3
SK	-	-	-	-	-	35,71	19,3
FI	-	-	-	-	43,75	42,86	41,5
SE	-	-	-	-	40,91	47,37	47,3
UK	13,58	14,81	14,81	18,39	24,14	25,64	24
<b>Average</b>	<b>16,34</b>	<b>17,74</b>	<b>19,31</b>	<b>25,93</b>	<b>30,19</b>	<b>31,08</b>	<b>24,3</b>

1) Situation on 17 July 1979, 2) Situation on 24 July 1984, 3) Situation on 25 July 1989, 4) Situation on 19 July 1994, 5) Situation in July 1999, 6) Situation on 30 January 2009, 7) Situation in January 2009

## ANNEXE 2

### Participation aux élections européennes Répartition Hommes/Femmes



Source : Eurobarometer, European Election Study 1999 & EP Post Election Survey 2004

Voir BANDUCCI Susan, University of Exeter - Extrait de la présentation réalisée au PE le 5 mars 2008 "*Gender, Electoral Turnout and Abstention in Europe*"