

# Support gender rights with your MEP vote

By Alexia Saoulli

FOR a woman or defender of gender equality, voting for the right European Member of Parliament next month is extremely important as it could directly impact decisions that support gender rights in Europe.

“We want the candidates to make a commitment that they will promote key issues in gender equality,” said Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) director, Susana Elisa Pavlou.

Pavlou said there were three main issues MIGS wanted to see featured in local MEPs electoral manifestos including violence against women, trafficking, and reconciliation of work and family life, including maternity and paternity leave, childcare facilities and so on.

“These gender equality issues have not been in any pre-election debates or featured highly in the pre-election programmes of any of the candidates,” she said.

A recent European Women’s Lobby (EWL) General Audit Report published in light of the June elections confirmed that two out of four main European political parties’ electoral manifestos do not consider gender equality a priority, she said. This was of concern when “our candidates belong to these European parties”, she added.

The report showed that “most political parties do not consider equality between women and men as a key priority” after analysing the available electoral manifestos of four of the main parties including the European People’s Party (EPP), the Party of European Socialists (PES), the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party (ALDE) and the European Greens.

“That’s why we want them (candidates) to tell us where they place gender equality in their list of priorities if we are going to vote for them,” she said.

The results of the review of the content of European electoral manifestos give the EPP and ALDE a red light, the Greens a yellow light and the PES a green light.

A red light indicates that the party’s manifesto does not prioritise gender equality in view of the June elections. A yellow light signals that the party’s manifesto is on the right track, but has not entirely prioritised and integrated gender equality. A green light indicates the party’s manifesto gives full priority to gender equality.

Earlier this month the European parliament blocked a draft report which would have seen maternity leave increased to 20 weeks with six weeks at full pay. The report had also proposed introducing a minimum of two weeks paternity leave. Although the plans were endorsed by the parliament’s women’s rights and gender equality committee they were blocked by EPP and ALDE deputies.

“As members of the Cyprus Women’s Lobby this is something we worked really hard towards and we were very disappointed it was blocked,” said Pavlou.

Pavlou said people might vote for a certain political party in Cyprus but that when that MEP got to Europe, he or she would belong to one of four political groups and may vote according to the group line.

“Usually the groups vote together so it’s really important that they take our concerns into account. All of the parties in Cyprus belong to one of the main European parties and therefore it’s important to know where they stand on these issues. Why would I vote for a particular party if an issue for me is going to be voted against,” said Pavlou. The MIGS director said the EWL’s report confirmed the importance of voting for the right MEP.