



IFE-EFI Brief

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Euromed Feminist Initiative IFE-EFI

February 2015

Citizenship, Gender and Democracy Building International Roundtable Discussion

9th – 10th February 2015
American University of Beirut, Lebanon

The international roundtable *Citizenship, Gender and Democracy Building* took place on the 9-10th of February 2015 at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon, organized by Euromed Feminist Initiative (IFE-EFI) in partnership the Syrian League for Citizenship (SLC) and the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship. This event was held in the frame of the program “Towards a Democratic Transition in Syria through an inclusive Constitution Building Process” supported by Sweden.

The roundtable brought together over 100 participants representing various civil society organizations, women’s rights groups, academics, researchers, legal scholars and media representatives. It provided a platform to collectively think, share experiences and foster solutions to common challenges of gender-inequality, the on-going conflicts, occupation and patriarchal domination. It broadened the concept of citizenship and came up with recommendations to be adapted as a base for future work. The roundtable examined theoretical and practical dimensions of citizenship and gender equality and addressed common challenges of exclusion, discrimination, negative stereotypes, violence and armed conflict. Furthermore, the event was a powerful expression of international networking, civil society alliance building and solidarity with the Syrian civil rights organizations.



Mr. Hassan Abbas, Ms. Lilian Halls French, Mrs. Diana Janse, the Swedish Ambassador to Syria and Mr. Fateh Azzam

The roundtable was opened by Mrs. Diana Janse, the Swedish Ambassador to Syria, who stressed the value of a concept of citizenship, which is based on mutual trust and positive collective habits of citizens. Mr. Fateh Azzam, of the Asfari Institute of Civil Society and Citizenship, emphasized the importance of having a clear vision for effective and active citizenship in order to direct the activities and goals of civil society actors. Mrs. Lilian Halls French, for the Euromed Feminist Initiative IFE-EFI, articulated the common goals of the participants: the realization of true equality for women, the enjoyment of their full rights and their freedom of movement and action in the public and private sphere. Mr. Hassan Abbas of the Syrian League for

Citizenship addressed the conference by urging participants to conceive of citizenship as a culture and practice rather than a mere formal legal status.

During the roundtable presentations and discussion, all speakers emphasized the need to move towards effectively implementation of international human rights and in particular women's rights frameworks in the local contexts. Though the event explicitly addressed the Syrian context, it also drew on the experiences of women from the MENA region and Europe in its theoretical presentations and practical discussions. While the central focus was on broadening the concept of citizenship to include gender-equality and democratic participation, it tackled a range of other related issues. The main themes that were addressed in the discussions included women's common experiences of exclusion from full citizenship rights and discrimination in public and private life; challenges faced in their effective political participation; experiences of violence at the hand of the patriarchal domination; the rights of refugees; and experiences of women during armed conflict.



The participants

The key conclusions and recommendations included the need to adopt a comprehensive approach to citizenship based on equal treatment and the enjoyment of universal human rights; the need for civil education to promote a culture of citizenship based on responsibility, gender equality, mutual respect, and to counter the violence of gender stereotypes; the importance of international solidarity in linking the work of civil society groups on the ground across national boundaries to counter the challenges of cultural relativism and to exert pressure on international and national bodies to promote equality as a first rank issue on all the political agendas.

The gathering represented an important step in expanding and strengthening the cooperation among women's rights defenders in Syria and in the wider Euromed region and building the necessary coalitions among activists with the common aim to counter the hegemonic patriarchal pattern and its manifestations in the lives of women everywhere. It provided the international solidarity for the Syrian women and men defenders of women's rights in their struggle for social justice and ending of the violent conflict in their country.

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