

**Achieving Work-Life Balance**  
**Saturday May 23rd 2015, Rotterdam.**

The panel

- Elke Ferner: Parliamentary State Secretary, woman and youth, SDP
- Tamar Sandberg: Member of the Knesset, Meretz
- Radmila Shekerinska: Deputy President, Social Democratic Union of Macedonia
- Lobna Jeribi: founder of SOLIDAR TUNISIA PROJECT

Moderator: Arjen Berkvens, Director of the Foundation Max van der Stoel

Many men and women currently are responsible for both domestic labour and paid labour. However, women do substantially more unpaid work than men, while at the same time increasing their participation on the labour market. This is not only stressful, but also makes women economically vulnerable, because it often concerns part time jobs or jobs in the informal sector. What are the best practices from countries in promoting to share the double burden? Can we bring about cultural change? What political measures can promote a better work-life balance?

Arjen Berkvens, the moderator, starts the discussion with asking the panel if they feel balanced. Tamar Zandberg replies that most of the people here define themselves as feminist and the famous saying is “the personal is political”. Part of our work is how we bring our personal lives into politics. However, people think the parliament is detached from the personal. We are representative for the population - our dilemmas are the same as our voters, which is why the question of work-life balance is raised often.

Radmila Shekerinska stresses that politics is taking a huge part of personal lives, even when you're not married and don't have children. You get criticized for not having children or being married and when you do, you get criticized for not being able to perform on all aspects of work. Life is complicated, especially for women.

Lobna Jeribi goes back to the period right after the revolution, when politicians in Tunisia were discussing the new internal rules. She tells us that asked to have a kindergarten within the assembly to be able to combine work and personal life. Her colleagues asked her not to bring it up because people would laugh at her. Her answer to these colleagues: we are here to change the world, we've had a revolution and we have to be the ones that start asking bold questions in order to make change happen. Radmila's request was not followed by actions but in other states the service is currently provided. The job of politicians is to lead the example. We have to dare to ask for brave things

Power was given to the islamists, so tells Lobna, but also to the conservatives and this led to a lack of balance so it was twice as difficult to achieve work-life balance, also because of our political colour. The Ettakatol party did an outstanding job in leading the discussion to this balance topic and it led to consensus on this topic. Even though they are small changes, more equal representation is possible nowadays. And however strong the opposition, it is very important that we keep telling them that this is what Tunisian women are asking for, according to Lobna.

Tamar tells about a bill proposal she made in the Knesset upon fraternity leave. Maternity leave is 14 to 16 weeks and it's to share between fathers and mothers. Tamar's proposal proposed a shared leave during the first 8 days after birth. This mutual fraternity and maternity leave is in order to form the new family in an equal way. Employers are very opposed - but if they would look at the economic outcome they would see that it's better for fathers to be at home in the first week rather than distracted at work.

Radmila emphasizes that the current government of Macedonia has been hurtful to Macedonian women and has turned back time. Macedonia is a more traditional society in terms of family roles but the government is trying to reverse the trend in terms of abortion, social decisions on working mothers and making women more fitting of the patriarchal role. The Social Democratic Union of Macedonia has managed during governments in spite of some pressure not to change rules about maternity leaves. Maternity leave is now 9 months and in case of twins 12 months. With that we have options for fathers to stay at home but it is not accepted by society. Nobody objects when a woman is successful as long as she is a good mother, good wife, unaggressive and well-groomed and good looking. This opposed to women and girls who try to change society. Sometimes deeds are missing from our activities so unfortunately we are not successful yet, Radmila says.

Arjen asks the panel if a revolution is needed. Elke Ferner replies that it would be important to have a revolution. She is deeply convinced that we need men also. We need men on our side that want to be role models. Also, we should not be perfectionists, we had to learn how to take care of ourselves and families and our man also.

Radmila stressed that sometimes we have been victim of revolution which ended up as liberation for many things but not for women. Women are also responsible for accepting social roles - part of our brain is still affected by expectations that have been going on for years. We have to apologize for being absent and successful. Solidarity among us can help and we should look at men, they are also victims and feel that they have to find excuses for marrying a strong woman and have a bigger role in the family. Radmila thinks the situation in many countries requires quotas. Our battle is far from over, we have to push on legal boundaries and society.