

Gender Balance

Thursday, 07 October 2010 19:54



The second edition of the book **Leadership féminin au Grand-Duché de Luxembourg** was launched yesterday evening at the Chambre de Commerce in Kirchberg.

Sonia Pinternagel, owner-manager of Assist Relocation, welcomed everyone in the packed conference room who had come to honour the women presented in the new edition of the book, as well as both women and men for the issue of gender

balance. She also thanked and introduced author Clara Moraru.

Clara said that people came along because of the issue of providing equal opportunities for men and women, and supporting gender balance in the workplace. She explained that encouraging women into leadership is a social business and was started by her company in 1999 with a 3,000 print run of the first edition.

Mentalities are changing and women can fill more roles than ever before, she said. Purchasing power of women has changed with women making 80% of consumer spending. She added that women in leadership roles have the possibility of affecting people's lives, and the book is a unique project, a non-profit social business which addresses various social issues, including raising the profile of women in business.

The book covers various domains of business, including diplomats, business leaders, entrepreneurs and also the non-profit sector. she then thanked many organisations who helped with the book, as well as the various sponsors. She said that each one in the audience could make a difference in promoting gender balance in the workplace and in social business.

Clara Moraru then moderated a round-table discussion with four invited guests: Her Excellency, Marja Lehto, the Ambassador of Finland to Luxembourg; Christopher Bowman, Director of the International School; Monica Johnsson, founder of Coach Dynamix; and David Micallef, General Manager of Bank of New York Mellon.

The discussion started off with some interesting facts and statements, including that research showed that companies with higher numbers of women in leadership teams showed significant better results than those without. The Bank of New York Mellon had experienced a paradigm shift from stereotypical leadership roles towards gender balance and the ISL supports it too, in appointing and promoting staff on merit.

The question was asked if gender balance resulted in women succeeding at the expense of men. The general consensus was that only a few people feel threatened. In the past 5-10 years, there has been significant movement in getting women into decision-making (operational) positions, but not necessarily at strategic decision-making levels.

On the comparison of gender balance in Luxembourg compared to in other countries, the Grand Duchy appears to be holding its own. However, there needs to be a public policy that supports combining families and careers.

Ambassador Lehto presented a case study of Finland where 55% of government ministers are women. The government implemented Gender Impact Assessment in a country where 71% of women participate in the labour market, but not at economic decision-making levels. In Luxembourg, women make up less than 5% of company board representation, while this figure is 27% in Sweden and 34% in Finland. In state-owned companies, the government's goal is for 40% of board members to be women. However, Finland is behind other countries in other areas, e.g. violence against women.

The panel then discussed tips for women who want to aspire to leadership positions and agreed that such tips are not gender-specific. Twenty years ago there was little self-confidence and assertiveness by women in business, but this has now changed a lot.

Many benefits are brought to companies by incorporating women into leadership positions, but how can we get the gender balance message across to men leaders, as opposed to women leaders? It needs a strong male sponsor of such a corporate initiative, rather than HR-led groups which are often informal. We need to ask what are the blocking factors in our organisation? and what are the measurement indicators to review the success of such initiatives?

The European Union has launched an initiative to support gender balance with Luxembourg's Commissioner Viviane Reding putting forward radical proposals to be adopted and implemented within the next five years.

The Women in Leadership initiative continues with a series of five events over the coming months, including the presentation of case studies of successful women in business.