



## **Report**

**Follow-up to the Istanbul Ministerial Conclusions  
Thematic Ad Hoc Working Group  
Brussels, 12 June 2008**

**Participation of Women in Political Life in the Euro-  
Mediterranean Partnership**

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Follow-up to the Istanbul Ministerial Conclusions Thematic Ad Hoc Working Group Brussels, 12 June 2008**

#### **Participation of Women in Political Life in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership**

Officials responsible for following up on the Istanbul Ministerial Conclusions in their respective countries, along with some other key stakeholders were invited to participate in this the second ad hoc expert group meeting at senior official level. Thirty-four delegations participated, some being represented by officials from their Brussels-based Embassies. Most of the participants had been following the issue from the outset, a factor which enriched and made more effective the exchange and debate during the workshop

The meeting was chaired by the Slovenian Presidency.

Dr Zahira Kamal, Director of the Palestinian Women's Research and Documentation Centre (UNESCO), presented an overview of the current numbers of women in decision-making positions globally, but with a specific focus on the Euromed region.

Women currently account for 17.7% of members of national parliaments globally. According to data from 2007 the Arab region has the lowest average representation of women in both the upper and the lower houses at under 10%. The percentage of women parliamentarians is highest in Tunisia and Iraq with figures of 20% and 25% respectively. The lowest numbers are in Lebanon where only 4.7% of parliamentarians are female.

The constraints on women's political participation were presented in terms of the persistence of gender stereotypes which presented politics as a male sphere of activity in which women were anomalous. This affects women's willingness to stand as candidates and also affects voter behaviour since women as well as men were often reluctant to vote for women candidates. Insufficient and biased media treatment is an important factor in the maintenance of negative stereotypes. In some countries there are still legislative constraints on women's political participation, and political parties themselves need to be convinced that party lists should reflect equal representation of men and women. Some countries had established quotas to enhance women's participation in parliament with mixed success.

Following a lively plenary debate, a second presentation was made by Ms. Rita Taphorn. The expert explained the role of electoral systems and quotas in enhancing women's participation in politics and discussed other concrete measures to address persistent obstacles to women's full participation. Experience in the field showed that electoral systems were not neutral in their impact on the representation of women; and that whereas quotas provide a tool for fast-tracking women and achieving higher representation they remain controversial in many countries. A combination of electoral system reform and 'temporary special measures' such as quotas, both being adapted to suit the specific context of their implementation yield the best results. It was stressed that any reform of the electoral system should be conducted with the widest possible public participation.

This presentation was followed by two case studies; the first presented by Algeria and the second by Portugal.

The delegate from **Algeria**, Mme Hassiba Houacine, Chef de Cabinet, Ministère Délégué Chargé de la Famille et de la Condition Féminine, stressed that Algerian women faced no legal barriers to equal participation in any sphere of activity. However this situation was not yet fully reflected in women's participation in political life. According to a study conducted by the Ministry of the Family & Women's Affairs almost 60% of women surveyed (13.755 women) had voted and that 52.7% had completed secondary education. However only 6.98% were active in any political party and those were primarily urban women.

However since 2004 there has been an increase in women's political participation as voters and as candidates. There are now two women Party Leaders, one of whom has stood for Presidential Election on two occasions. Currently women occupy 30 out of 389 seats in the national assembly and 4 out of 140 seats in the Upper House. A system of quotas allied with electoral reforms has been proposed by the Minister of the Family and Women's Affairs in May this year as the best way to enhance women's political participation in Algeria.

The delegate from **Portugal**, Mme Elza Pais, La Présidente de la Commission pour la Citoyenneté et Egalité des Genres presented a case-study on "Participation des Femmes à la Vie Politique nationale, régionale et locale, systèmes électoraux et autres mesures législatives et administratives."

The recognition of equality in all domains is a fundamental principle in the Portuguese Constitution of 1976, and considerable progress has been made in terms of legislation towards equality, though this has not yet been fully reflected in the representation of women in decision-making in public life.

The current government contains six women members out of a total of 54. Of these six two are ministers and 4 are Secretaries of State. 21.3% of parliamentarians are women. At the local level there are women mayors in 19 out of 308 municipalities that is to say 6.2% which represents the largest number to date.

Mme Paiz noted a number of advances towards equality that have been made in recent years, such as the revision of the Constitution in 1997 to reflect that 'the promotion of equality between women and men is a fundamental task for the State' ; and the progressive electoral reform which resulted in the inclusion in the Electoral Law in 2006 of the provision that lists of candidates for parliamentary and local elections as well as for the European Parliament must guarantee a minimum representation of 33% of each sex. In addition party lists were not to contain more than two candidates of the same sex placed consecutively on the list.

### **Key Messages from the Meeting**

Even though no formal conclusions were approved, experts underlined the need to have some outputs from the meeting which could be sent for discussion to the senior official meetings and serve as "*food for thought*" for the next Ministerial conference on gender issues to be organized during 2009.

The key points arising from the presentations, the case studies and the contributions of all participants were summarized as follows:

1. There is a need for **better dissemination** by the EC, by governments, NGOs, media, women's organizations and all others involved of the **Istanbul Ministerial**

**Conclusions** to ensure the widest possible popular participation in implementing and reporting on follow-up.

2. There is a need for **greater public discussion of measures** relating to enhancing women's political participation e.g. those issues related to electoral reform, and to establishment of 'temporary special measures' such as quotas in certain contexts as defined by the CEDAW (Article 4 and General Recommendation 25). Measures taken to enhance women's political participation should include both electoral reform and targeted 'special measures' such as quotas and must be context specific. In this sense, it is very important to involve the electoral commissions or any other competent authorities and political parties in the reforms.
3. **Media of all kinds have an important role to play in ensuring more, and more positive coverage** of women's issues and achievements and thus combating traditional stereotypes which have a negative influence on women's taking a more active role in politics at all levels. Women in political life also need to be trained in effective use of the media.
4. The role of the **education system** not only as providing knowledge and skills but also as an **important channel of socialization and transmittal of values** including those related to gender equality must be strengthened. In almost all countries the educational achievements of women at secondary and tertiary levels were not reflected in their roles as decision-makers in public life. It is important to ensure that the content and quality of education promotes gender equality, and not just to focus on parity in enrolment figures.
5. It is important to recognize that **entry points for women's political participation at national level are mostly provided by grass-roots women's organizations**, local administrations and municipalities, trade unions and so forth. There is a need for programmes to encourage women's participation at this level, for better documentation of women's participation, and for building upon these achievements.
6. There is a need for **building women's capacity** to participate in politics and for both men and women to have thorough comprehension of the importance of balanced representation in the political process.
7. There is also a need for **gender awareness training** for political parties.
8. The importance of **networking and cooperation at national and regional level amongst women's organisations** with a view to increasing political participation of women, their visibility, and strengthening their political skills and self-confidence cannot be over-emphasized.

## Report

### Background

The Euromed Partners who attended the Istanbul Ministerial Conference “Strengthening the role of women in society’ in November 2006, invited the Euromed Committee to convene at least once a year a Euromed ad hoc meeting at expert senior official level to review the implementation of the Ministerial Conclusions issued by the Conference, and to inform the annual Euromed Foreign Affairs Ministers Conference as to the results of their deliberations.

At the time of the first ad hoc meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2007 the objective of which was to review the first year of implementation of the Istanbul conclusions, it was proposed that two ad hoc committees should be held yearly. The first of the two annual meetings should have a specific thematic focus on one of the main objectives of the Istanbul conclusions. The objective of the second ad hoc meeting to be held each year would be to conduct an overall review of the achievements of the EuroMed partners under the three pillars of the conclusions.

### 1 Participation of Women in Political Life in the Euromed Partnership:

Officials responsible for following up on the Istanbul Ministerial Conclusions in their respective countries, along with some other key stakeholders were invited to participate in the meeting. Thirty-four delegations participated, some being represented by officials from their Brussels-based Embassies. Most of the participants had been following the issue from the outset, a factor which enriched and made more effective the exchange and debate during the workshop (see list of participants at Annex II).

The meeting was chaired by the Slovenian Presidency (see Agenda at Annex I).

Before the formal initiation of the meeting, Mr. Richelle, Director-General for Europeaid, launched the new regional programme “Enhancing Equality between Men and Women in the EuroMed Region” (2008-2011). The programme aims to:

- Support and reinforce current dynamics that favour both *de jure* and *de facto* gender equality;
- Improve understanding and knowledge of the various forms of violence against women;
- Ensure that the Istanbul ministerial conclusions on “Strengthening the role of women in society” are followed up.

The draft agenda was approved as proposed including the change on item 1: The Presentation from the Euro-Mediterranean Parliament Assembly did not take place.

## 2 Participation of Women in Political Life: State of Play in the Euro-Mediterranean partner countries

Dr Zahira Kamal, Director of the Palestinian Women's Research and Documentation Centre (UNESCO), presented an overview of the current numbers of women in decision-making positions globally, but with a specific focus on the Euromed region.

It was noted that whilst the numbers of women parliamentarians has increased globally the rate is still far below the 30% which is regarded as representing a critical mass which would ensure that women can exert a meaningful influence on the democratic process. Women currently account for 17.7% of members of national parliaments globally. According to data from 2007 the Arab region has the lowest average representation of women in both the upper and the lower houses at under 10%. The percentage of women parliamentarians is highest in Tunisia and Iraq with figures of 20% and 25% respectively. The lowest numbers are in Lebanon where only 4.7% of parliamentarians are female. The numbers of women in senior political positions globally and in the Euromed countries remains low. Only 4.7% of Heads of State are women, and 16.1 % of ministerial posts globally are held by women.

The constraints on women's political participation were presented in terms of the persistence of gender stereotypes which presented politics as a male sphere of activity in which women were anomalous. This affects women's willingness to stand as candidates and also affects vote behaviour since women as well as men were often reluctant to vote for women candidates. Insufficient and biased media treatment is an important factor in the maintenance of negative gender stereotypes. In some countries there are still legislative constraints on women's political participation, and political parties themselves need to be convinced that party lists should reflect equal representation of men and women. Some countries had established quotas to enhance women's participation in parliament with mixed success.

The floor was opened for discussion. There followed a lively debate with several countries presenting their experience in strengthening the position of women in political life and in decision-making.

The delegate from **Egypt** reported that despite very real advances, Egyptian women still faced many challenges. Although Egypt was the first Arab country to grant women full voting rights, including the right to run for elected office, women's parliamentary participation is still unsatisfactory. A number of measures to address this situation are now in place. Consideration of the establishment of a quota system, and of returning to a system of proportionate party lists is now taking place within the context of electoral reform. Other measures to raise public awareness as to the importance of balanced representation, and to increase the numbers of women registered to vote are ongoing.

On the executive level the picture of women's participation is brighter. The first group of women judges, 31 in total, has now been appointed reflecting the government's commitment to this issue.

The National Council of Women (NCW) has created the Center for the Political Empowerment of Women (CPEW) with an ambitious programme consisting of three major components, namely: support to women intending to run as candidates in

parliamentary elections; provision of visibility and support to current Egyptian women parliamentarians; programmes of public awareness-raising as to the importance of women's participation in political life.

The delegate from **Malta** raised a point which would be reflected more generally in discussion throughout the meeting that women's achievements in education at the highest levels are not reflected in their access to senior office in politics or in management. Maltese women account for approximately 30% of students at tertiary level but presently occupy 9% of the seats in the National Parliament and 20% of the places on Local Councils. However the statutes of major political parties do allow for positive action at party level and following the recent parliamentary elections targets have been set by Government to ensure that a minimum of 30-40% of both sexes are represented on government boards and commissions.

'Taking Gender Equality to Local Communities' a project funded through the Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality, and led by the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) completed in May 2008 aimed to mainstream gender equality into local development through educational and publicity campaigns carried out at Local Council level.

The National Council of Women (NCW) in Malta in collaboration with the National Statistics Office (NSO) published in 2007 a report entitled 'Perceived obstacles to the participation of women in decision-making positions'. One of the main obstacles was the fact that in Malta as elsewhere women bear the main responsibility for care and maintenance of the family and its social obligations.

Several countries stressed that an important entry point for women into political life at the national level was through their participation at local or municipal levels. The speaker and others made the point that it was also crucial that politicians of both sexes reached out to involve women's organizations who whilst being a very important constituency often remained marginalized from the political process.

### **3 Participation of women in national, regional and local political life; electoral systems, quotas and other legislative and administrative measures**

A presentation was made by Ms. Rita Taphorn. The expert explained the role of electoral systems and quotas in enhancing women's participation in politics and discussed other concrete measures to address persistent obstacles to women's full participation. Experience in the field showed that electoral systems were not neutral in their impact on the representation of women; and that whereas quotas provide a tool for fast-tracking women and achieving higher representation they remain controversial in many countries. A combination of electoral system reform and 'temporary special measures' such as quotas, both being adapted to suit the specific context of their implementation yield the best results. It was stressed that any reform of the electoral system should be conducted with the widest possible public participation.

This presentation was followed by two case studies; the first presented by Algeria and the second by Portugal.

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However since 2004 there has been an increase in women's political participation as voters and as candidates. There are now two women Party Leaders, one of whom has stood for Presidential Election on two occasions. Currently women occupy 30 out of 389 seats in the national assembly and 4 out of 140 seats in the Upper House.

Although a gradual evolution in participation is visible there are a number of challenges and obstacles still to be faced. Awareness-raising for political parties with respect to the need to include more women is vital and a number of important activities have taken place to make this a reality. Parties have taken a number of measures including placing women at the head of party lists, and establishing reserved seats for women. Quotas are not regarded favorably by many politicians and are even regarded by some as damaging to the image of women.

However a system of quotas allied with electoral reforms has been proposed by the Minister of the Family and Women's Affairs in May this year as the best way to enhance women's political participation in Algeria.

The delegate from **Portugal**, Mme Elza Pais, La Présidente de la Commission pour la Citoyenneté et Egalité des Genres presented a case-study on "Participation des Femmes à la Vie Politique nationale, régionale et locale, systèmes électoraux et autres mesures législatives et administratives."

The recognition of equality in all domains is a fundamental principle in the Portuguese Constitution of 1976, and considerable progress has been made in terms of legislation towards gender equality, though this has not yet been fully reflected in the representation of women in decision-making in public life.

The electoral system of proportional representation is insufficient in itself to guarantee an equal representation of women at different levels of the political system.

The current government contains six women members out of a total of 54. Of these six two are ministers and four are Secretaries of State. 21.3% of parliamentarians are women. At the local level there are women mayors in 19 out of 308 municipalities that is to say 6.2% which represents the largest number to date.

Mme Paiz noted a number of advances towards gender equality that have been made in recent years, such as the revision of the Constitution in 1997 to reflect that 'the promotion of equality between women and men is a fundamental task for the State'; and the progressive electoral reform which resulted in the inclusion in the Electoral Law in 2006 of the provision that lists of candidates for parliamentary and local elections as well as

for the European Parliament must guarantee a minimum representation of 33% of each sex. In addition party lists were not to contain more than two candidates of the same sex placed consecutively on the list. These provisions are being strictly monitored and enforced and an evaluation of their impact on the representation of women in decision-making will be carried out in 2011. It is anticipated that the law of 2006 will have a dynamic effect on the make-up of decision-making bodies which result from the next elections.

A lively debate ensued with excellent participation from all present.

The delegate from **Greece** after thanking the European Commission and the Slovenian Presidency for organizing the meeting stated that whilst the principle of 30% representation of women in Parliament was recognized as the minimum necessary for a 'critical mass' the results of the 2007 elections could not be considered as a successful implementation of that principle given that women took only 48 out of 300 parliamentary seats.

Subsequently a new Law (3636) has been published in the Official Gazette on 1 February 2008 which states that at least one third of candidates on electoral lists of political parties, coalitions of parties or independent candidates must be women. If this practice is not observed then the lists will be considered invalid.

The next elections are scheduled for 2011 and evaluation of the impact of this new law will be made after the election. The speaker noted in closing that the effective implementation of this new law also required the population at large be sensitized to accepting the principle of equal representation of women in decision-making positions.

The delegate from the **Islamic Republic of Mauritania** provided an overview of the situation of women in that country, reflecting also on the impact on women of the economic crisis which placed an extra burden on them particularly where men had migrated in search of work. In response to this situation more women had entered the labour market and had also taken up activities in the informal sector. Mauritania is signatory to all major international conventions relating to gender equality and women's status.

In terms of enhancing women's role in decision-making the government had taken a number of important steps, amongst these being the creation of a Ministerial post for the promotion of women, and the nomination of women to ambassadorial posts. For the elections of 2007 a quota of 20% representation of women had been established and that percentage had been exceeded at some levels.

At the municipal level for example 30.33% of municipal councilors were women. At the national level however only 17.9% of parliamentarians and 16.98% of senators were women. A network composed of current and former women ministers, and of women parliamentarians of government and opposition parties has been established and a number of important strategies for promoting women in decision-making at all levels is being put in place.

The speaker noted that the persistence of negative gender stereotypes which affects women's behaviour in seeking public positions, as well as the attitude of men to their public role are major challenges to be addressed. Difficulties in reconciling the demands

of work and family remain a major barrier to women's participation in public life. Globalization which brings enhanced possibilities of communication and experience sharing was seen to have a very positive dimension. Initiatives in gender budgeting, and efforts to strengthen the capacity to collect and analyze gender-disaggregated data were seen as important elements of the way forward.

The delegate from **Tunisia** whilst acknowledging the effectiveness of the establishment of quotas, of electoral reform and so forth also stressed the importance of not losing sight of the underlying causes for women's exclusion from the decision-making processes. These include the fact that women even when they enter the formal labour market still bear the major burden of responsibility for family and child care and have difficulties in reconciling the demands of work outside & inside the home. Unequal economic participation cannot but impact on their self-confidence and decision-making role in the public sphere. The Tunisian delegate stressed that the media have an important role to play in showing women in decision-making and other non-traditional roles.

The delegate from **Morocco** stressed the importance of local government posts as providing entry level positions for women into the larger political process. She recognized also the important role that political parties had to play and the necessity for the judicious use of quotas. There was often a need for modification of the culture of political parties where attitudes and behaviour discouraged women from participating.

In addition to statements on the situation in individual countries there was considerable debate about the Istanbul follow-up process itself which it is important to carry forward to future meetings. The delegate from the **European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)** highlighted the role of the EESC in promoting the Istanbul Ministerial Conclusions through civil society in the region noting in particular the important contribution made to this process by the Euro-Mediterranean Summit of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions and in particular the Athens Summit 2007 and the forthcoming Morocco Summit in 2008.

Several participants including the delegate from the **Euromed Human Rights Network** noted that there is a need for a much wider dissemination of the Ministerial Conclusions and Framework for Action by the EC and by concerned governments. Some participants also requested that a much clearer format for national plans of action with clear bench marks for monitoring achievement be developed.

#### **4 Beyond Numbers, what social, economic and cultural changes are needed**

Ms. Zahira Kamal, made a brief presentation and gave an overview of the key issues arising from the plenary discussions that had already taken place.

She stressed the need to amend laws which constitute an obstacle to woman's full social and political participation as well as to take affirmative actions specific to the context. It was recognized that the electoral system could facilitate or hinder women's full participation and that it was important to establish an electoral system which facilitated the participation of women.

Political parties need to be educated on these issues and to establish party lists which maximize the chances of women candidates to be elected.

Emphasis was placed on the importance of providing political education for women in order that they are enabled to fully participate in the political process. The need for education, particularly of male MPs, and of political parties overall as they are normally led by men, to understand women's and gender issues and to recognize the importance of women as a constituency was again stressed. It was proposed that there was a need for gender-awareness training for all public officials.

Media of all kinds have an important role to play in raising public awareness of the importance of gender-balanced participation; in presenting non-traditional images of women and men; and putting women's and gender issues squarely in the public arena. **Establishment of quotas can result inter alia in modification of traditional stereotypes by presenting women in new roles as parliamentarians or other kinds of decision-makers.** At the same time women politicians need to learn how to use the media in their interest rather than being only used by the media. Training in public speaking is also needed to enhance women's capacity in this respect

The importance of women's networks and organisations as providing the spring-board for political participation was re-iterated as was the need for politicians, including parliamentarians, and other decision-makers to reach out to and include women's organisations as key players.

Aside from honing their political and organisational skills in such groups women also needed to strengthen their capacity to introduce their particular perspective in discussions in all sectors of activity, i.e. their skills in mainstreaming their concerns and perspective are critical to their assuming a full public role.

Women's involvement in policy formulation through such mechanisms as gender budgeting was also advocated.

During the subsequent discussion the delegate from **Sweden** confirmed the key contribution of quotas towards the equal representation of women and men in political decision-making in that country. A major step forward was the establishment in 1994 by the largest political party of so-called 'sandwich lists' according to which women's and men's names alternated on the party lists.

During the last twenty-five years there has been an increase in women's representation at national, regional and local levels. The representation of women in Parliament in 2006 was 47.3%; in the same year 47.6% of the elected representatives at regional level and 42.3% at the local level were women.

She stressed that whilst the differences in treatment of men and women in the nomination process relates to the internal activities of the political parties, governments also should take responsibility. Whilst legislation on quotas is one option the Swedish government has chosen to establish targets for women's representation on, for example, the boards of public agencies, in state-owned companies and in the civil service where currently 45% of the employees are women.

The setting of time-bound targets for the proportion of women members on the boards of public agencies has resulted in the fact that 49% of board members of public agencies at national level and 50% at regional level are women. On average 44% of board members of state-owned companies are women.

The delegate from **Denmark** also noted the high percentage of women in decision-making positions stating however that this had been achieved without the use of quotas. She stressed the key role of political parties in enhancing women's participation in decision-making. She was amongst the several delegates who also noted that women may find an easier entry point into political life by starting at the municipal level.

## 5 Conclusions

This meeting can be regarded as a pilot experience in the framework of the Istanbul Conclusions follow-up. During the meeting an interesting exchange of views took place concerning the need to have a more focused follow up of the Istanbul Ministerial Conclusions. This meeting of the ad hoc expert group has produced a number of ideas which should be fed into the process of preparing the next ministerial meeting in 2009.

Even though no formal conclusions were approved it was agreed by the participants that there was a need to have some outputs from the meeting, which could be sent for discussion to the senior official meetings and could perhaps also serve as "*food for thought*" for the next Ministerial Conference on gender equality and women's participation to be organised during 2009.

## 6 Key messages to be taken forward to senior officials and the next meeting of EuroMed Ministers:

These key messages, as summarized by the European Commission and the Presidency, aim to convey the ideas most frequently articulated during the meeting. It was considered that these were the major points to be taken into account in the ongoing debate about the participation of women in political life in the EuroMed arena and therefore the ones that the next ministerial meeting should consider:

1. There is a need for **better dissemination** by the EC, by governments, NGOs, media, women's organizations and others involved of the **Istanbul Ministerial Conclusions** to ensure the widest possible popular participation in implementing and reporting on follow-up.
2. There is a need for **greater public discussion of measures** relating to enhancing women's political participation e.g. those issues related to electoral reform, to establishment of 'temporary special measures' such as quotas in certain contexts

as is defined by the CEDAW (Article 4). Measures taken to enhance women's political participation should include both electoral reform and targeted 'special measures' such as quotas and must be context specific. In this sense, it is very important to involve the electoral commissions or any other competent authorities and political parties in the reforms.

3. **Media of all kinds have an important role to play in ensuring more, and more positive coverage** of women's issues and achievements and thus combating traditional stereotypes which have a negative influence on women's taking a more active role in politics at all levels. Women in political life also need to be trained in effective use of the media.
4. The role of the **education system** not only as providing knowledge and skills but also as an **important channel of socialization and transmittal of values** including those related to gender equality must be strengthened. In almost all countries the educational achievements of women at secondary and tertiary levels were not reflected in their roles as decision-makers in public life. It is important to ensure that the content and quality of education promotes gender equality, and not just to focus on parity in enrolment figures.
5. It is important to recognize that **entry points for women's political participation at national level are mostly provided by grass-roots women's organizations**, local administrations and municipalities, trade unions and so forth. There is a need for programmes to encourage women's participation at this level, for better documentation of women's participation, and for building upon these achievements.
6. There is a need for **building women's capacity** to participate in politics and for both men and women to have thorough comprehension of the importance of balanced representation in the political process.
7. There is also a need for **gender awareness training** for political parties.
8. The importance of **networking and cooperation at national and regional level amongst women's organisations** with a view to increasing political participation of women, their visibility, and strengthening their political skills and self-confidence cannot be over-emphasized.