



Grassroots for Europe Round Table Webinar #45W : Women's Role in Democracy and Peace.



Summary Report

2024 is a pivotal year for elections across the world and across Europe, while wars rage and autocratic forces often seem in the ascendant.

This year, **Politico.eu** warned on Women's Day that ***“For women's rights, the European Parliament election in June could be a watershed moment - and not in a good way.”*** “In previous years ... many of these rights have been taken away or threatened significantly” in some EU countries, said Jérôme Andolfatto of the European Women's Lobby. The far-right Identity and Democracy (ID) group and the right-wing European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group are set to hold more seats in the European Parliament than ever before. At a local and national level, parties affiliated with these groups have sought to water down or eliminate key rights such as access to abortion and targeted non-discrimination and gender equality legislation.

Women's representation in European politics has improved, but remains limited. [Recent UN data shows](#) that women represent only 16% of peace process delegations – fewer than previously. On March 6th the [European Women's Lobby](#) [launched its manifesto](#), *Europe at a crossroad: Equal participation at all levels* for the #Euelections2024, accompanied by a Lobbying Kit for campaigners. [Laura](#)

Kaun, Policy and Campaigns Director of the European Women Lobby argues that the threat to hard-won women's rights is a concern for society and peace: "If we want to materialise the European project of peace, democracy, inclusion, equality and solidarity, it's time to fully realise that [#womensrights](#) are not only a women's issue. Equality between women and men should be a concern for everyone and would be beneficial to European society as a whole".

For centuries, women have courageously stood against violence, militarism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, misogyny and racism. The [Women In Black](#) international network founded by Jewish and Palestinian women in Jerusalem and Haifa in 1988 continues [in the UK](#) calling for peace, justice and sustainable security in the Middle East, Ukraine, Yemen, Sudan and beyond. [Women can be the most effective enablers and agents of change](#), as they showed in the miners' strikes in the 1980s and the Peace Movement in Northern Ireland. Remona Aly's recent [article in the Guardian](#) argues for the need for women to be included in peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine, as they were in the [Good Friday agreement in Ireland](#).

In October 2023 the United Nations [reaffirmed](#) that "women's role in sustaining peace is more critical than ever". [See also: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/un-security-council>].

Drawing on the outstanding expertise and achievement of our guest contributors, this webinar session aimed to reinforce our shared and effective pro-European commitment to advancing the essential role of women's rights and agency in the defence and pursuit of democracy, peace and progressive change – particularly looking to make a difference in the context of the year's fateful elections. The webinar was chaired by Magdalena Williams and Cecilia Jastrzemska [President of YEM UK]

About our panel:

Gina Miller has on two occasions courageously and successfully taken legal action to curb executive encroachments on democracy following the Brexit vote: in the High Court, in November 2016 establishing that Parliament must legislate before the Government could invoke Article 50, and in the Supreme Court in September 2019, establishing that the prorogation of Parliament was unlawful. In 2022 she founded the True and Fair Party, which she will lead (standing as a candidate) in the upcoming UK general elections, with a programme to fix our broken political, economic and social system.

Julie Ward, As a former Labour MEP (2014-20) Julie is in active contact with many progressive European organisations. She served on the European Parliament Committees for Culture & Education, Women's Rights & Gender Equality, Regional Development and Economic Affairs, with responsibility for relations with Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, and continues to work in the Balkans and with Ukraine Solidarity Campaign. She is a National Council member of Another Europe is Possible, and worked with the [Citizens Take Over Europe](#) initiative. She was an expert member of Goldsmiths Law Dept 'Britain in Europe' thinktank, and contributed to a [policy briefing on immigration](#). She is a child rights campaigner with a particular focus on unaccompanied minors and is currently campaigning to shut down a detention centre in Durham.

Helen Maguire BEM, currently a Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate, is a nationally recognised award-winning community volunteer and fundraiser, having secured over £1

million for UK charities since leaving the British Army. She is a former Captain in the Royal Military Police who served on peacekeeping missions in Bosnia and in Iraq.

Kati Systä is an executive board member of Young European Federalists (JEF), a political youth NGO with over 35 national sections (including our own YEM-UK), advocating for the creation of a democratic European federation as a guarantee for peace, the rule of law and human rights. Kati works as an advocate with Finnish scout and guide organisations, is writing a master's thesis in public international law, and has experience in working with EU policy and advocacy, Nordic cooperation, foreign relations, and questions of international justice and human rights. Kati is Co-chair of the Finnish Green Party European working group and coordinated the writing of the party's manifesto for the 2024 EP elections.

Jane Morrice is a Northern Irish politician and journalist who helped architect the Good Friday Agreement. After being elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly on behalf of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, she became Deputy Speaker of the Assembly. She was Head of the European Commission Office in Northern Ireland and a reporter for BBC Belfast. Morrice was Vice President of the [European Economic and Social Committee](#) (EESC) from 2013 to 2015 and again from 2019 until 2020. She is Honorary President of the European Movement (Northern Ireland) and a member of the National Council of Grassroots for Europe.

Gina Miller

Many people think that Gina Miller's involvement in politics started with her two famous court cases, one ensuring a parliamentary vote on Brexit in 2017 and the other contesting the prorogation of parliament in 2019. However, her political awareness started when as a child in 1950s British Guiana she grew up knowing and seeing her parents' friend, the formidable Janet Rosenberg Jagan. In the 1950s Janet Jagan was part of the movement for British Guiana independence and in 1997 she became the first female president in South America.

Gina has been particularly active in areas which disproportionately affect women and children, such as special needs, modern day slavery, domestic violence, transparency and safeguarding and the charity sector. Internationally she has been involved in projects such as stopping out of date baby products and medicines going to third world countries, three EU directives on consumer protection, modern day slavery, street kids, and more recently, a project to get safe passage for female lawyers and judges fleeing Afghanistan. She has also been a peace and resolution ambassador for the Tutu Foundation for nine years.

Gina acknowledges that her successes would have been impossible without collaboration with some amazingly courageous women who were capable of separating emotional intelligence responses from intellectual responses. That ability is particularly needed in the Gaza conflict at the moment, yet sadly women are under-represented in high level negotiations, as well as the top tables of business and policymaking. Such under-

representation costs lives because, in Gina's experience, women tend to go to enormous lengths to ensure resolution and peace. She cited the Argentinian Mothers Movement, which bravely campaigned for the 30,000 people who were 'disappeared' by the military dictatorship during the 1970s. At the time pregnant female prisoners were allowed to give birth, but were then murdered by the regime. Although women have always suffered everywhere, there has been some progress. 23 years ago the UN Security Council passed the landmark Resolution 1325, which requires parties in a conflict to prevent violation of women's rights, to support women's participation in peace negotiations, and in post conflict reconstruction, and to protect women and girls from war time sexual violence. Research has shown that when women have an influence on peace negotiations the chance of reaching a successful outcome increases by an astonishing 24%. And yet appallingly most peace accords do not have a single female co-signature.

A major reason for their under-representation is the social backlash faced by assertive women. A strong vocal woman does not fit with society's image of female. A strong social undercurrent is that women should not be in these places, and if they are they get maligned as "bloody difficult women." Gina Miller intends to continue being exactly that. However, young women in particular do worry about what others think and want to be liked, and so have to overcome their own unconscious bias and stop saying 'sorry.' If we examine why women are better at negotiation around the table, the reason tends to be their capacity to empathise and their emotional intelligence. Women have a greater ability to bond with people, to walk in someone else's shoes and to find common ground.

Women's social status as primary caregivers for children and the elderly has developed their negotiating skills and made them readier to collaborate. Empathy can create those stable relationships and trust which are necessary to establish peace. With analysts saying we are entering an increasingly unstable pre-war era, it is imperative that we bridge the gender gap in peace negotiations. Yet women are obviously not being called to the table. In the British business world, for example, there are only 21 female CEOs in the FTSE 250. Such under-representation means that women have to push harder and be more vocal.

Gina Miller's horrific Brexit experiences were made worse by her being a woman of colour, but by persevering in speaking out and doing her civic duty she embodied the need for women to stick together. But she also stresses that men have to be advocates and ensure women's access to the top table.

Although Gina Miller is now tough enough to stand for parliament, many existing women MPs are sadly walking away from Westminster's toxic misogyny. She welcomes the fact

that in Epsom and Ewell, where she is standing, the three main candidates are women of different political outlooks who are prepared to brave such a toxic environment. Unless women correct under-representation in Westminster, men will always take life and death decisions on their behalf. Women must stand up and be counted and support each other, because there is safety in numbers. However, they should go beyond just listening to each other by persuading men to come alongside. A 50-50 gender split in parliament is desirable, and while it may not happen in our generation, there are lots of brave young women who will eventually effect change through their energy, patience and empathy. The world is at a point of transformation, with elections in 72 countries in 2024. There are signs of hope. In Latin America's second largest democracy, Mexico, the two main candidates are female. Mexico with a female president would represent an extraordinary stride forward for women.

Julie Ward

Julie began by referring listeners to her recent biography.

She became politically active following the introduction of austerity in 2010 which she saw as destroying everything she cared about, the arts, careers, library and youth services, legal aid and women's' refuges. She worked in the arts and saw that this area as being a prime target for cuts. In 2012 the Labour Party started selecting candidates for the 2014 European elections. Having been involved in numerous youth and action programmes and particularly provoked by right-wing media reporting on the EU, Julie put her name forward. Her social enterprise organisation was the British partner for a peace school in Germany where young people from across the political divide, for example, Ukraine and Russia, or Israel and Palestine could meet together in the same room. This was the embodiment of Europe and not the picture presented by the British right-wing press. Although doubtful that she had the relevant experience, the horrendous rape and subsequent death of a young women in Delhi, convinced Julie that she had to act on behalf of women everywhere in the face of the pandemic of gender based violence. She became an organiser for 1 Billion Rising and was selected as Labour candidate for the European elections, benefitting from PR and zipped lists which put women at the top. It is vital that we change our electoral system as FPTP militates against the election of women.

Having been elected as MEP, Julie served on the Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee and the Committee for Culture and Education. These committees had powerful strategies to counter such the far-right, extremists and anti-abortion lobbyists. By placing a

cross-party cordon sanitaire around such groups, committees ensured that they were kept away from power and influence. Although we would like the European Parliament to work faster and be more progressive, its premise of finding common cause and reaching agreement provides a much kinder environment for women and is a far better place to practise grown-up politics. Although on the left of the Labour party, as an MEP Julie was able to win nearly everything she proposed through hard work and with the support of a dedicated office team. It was possible to look at specific issues, such as women and LGBT refugees. Julie's colleague, Mary Honeyball, (Labour MEP 2000 – 2019) authored a powerful report on this subject. There was an impressive campaign supporting the Women in Black, standing up against the Polish government's rolling back of women's rights. When a delegation of Women in Black came to the European Parliament, members of the committee also wore black as a show of solidarity. The concept of solidarity is very European and does not get much coverage in the UK. The European Union is a union of solidarity with an intersectional approach being used for policy making. A gender lens is applied across all committees with each one having gender mainstreaming coordinators. Regrettably, in the UK parliament nobody talks about intersectionality, or gender mainstreaming. There is a Women's Budget Group which is sometimes invited to talk about how budget decisions, policies and laws affect and could better support women, but it not usual for Westminster parliamentarians to work in this way.

All Mes had responsibilities for relations with non-EU countries - Julie's being with Bosnia Herzegovina and Kosovo with particular attention paid to Women victims of gender violence during the war. Because of work done in the EU parliament, It was possible to ensure that the Kosovo government granted these victims a stipend. Julie recommends listeners to follow Alexandra McPhee, with whom she worked from the beginning of her mandate in 2014. They were trying to track what was happening to Crimean Tatars who were being disappeared. Alexandra is doing extraordinary work in extremely difficult circumstances, with the Center for Civil Liberties in Kiev, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 2022.

Tribute must be paid to all women in war zones, whether they are victims or doing vital work, reporting, organising aid, working as medics and bringing practical assistance. As in Kashmir, war has created so many widows with no livelihood but at the same time, responsibility for a wider family. As a result of her experience, the celebrated human rights lawyer, Margaret Owen (OBE), founded Widows for Peace through Democracy, the first international organisation to comprehensively address human rights issues in the context of widowhood. Julie stresses that widows of all ages and in all sections of society are

suffering dreadfully and in particular are stigmatised if they are the victims of sexual violence. There are huge risks in the forthcoming European Parliament elections, with polling suggesting a move to the right. For some time now, lobby groups funded by fundamental right-wing Christian organisation from the US have been pushing their anti-abortion agenda. If these right-wing groups get a toe-hold, we could see our rights taken away. So, we should never become complacent, it is vital to safeguard what we have and to keep fighting to broaden the number of people who can enjoy these rights.

To conclude with some positives. There has been some success for women's place in democracy, with women elected as Police and Crime Commissioners, women leading local councils and women judges. However, although some women doing extraordinary things, they are not the norm. This is in large part because the media is controlled by men with everything played out through a male lens. A system still prevails where men can expect a role to be theirs and where women's contribution remains invisible and unrecorded. Take for example, the case of Countryfile presenter, Miriam O'Reilly. When the programme moved to a prime-time slot in 2008/9 the BBC replaced her with younger presenters – male colleagues were not treated in this way. Following a lengthy and stressful legal battle, Miriam won her case against the BBC for ageism.

Helen Maguire

I am honoured to be here today amongst women who, like me, have endeavoured to effect change for the common good. Each of us has a unique journey. Today, I'm going to share a part of my story and offer insights on how I think we can all work better together to create a more peaceful society.

Women play a critical role in shaping the fabric of our societies. Yet, despite being half of the world's population, our voices are often marginalised. We need to advocate for a future where women's voices are not just heard but valued as essential peacemakers.

My journey began with a desire to serve and to make a difference. Graduating from university with a background in languages, I contemplated joining the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. However, the call of duty led me to join the Army, inspired by the opportunity to lead, to be outdoors, and to utilise my language skills for humanitarian purposes.

I went through the tough officer selection process and gained a place at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. What struck me at Sandhurst was the significant role army officers

play in peace-making and negotiation across the globe. Little did I know that my journey would soon take me to Iraq.

In 2003, Iraq was starting to heat up again, in February there were worldwide protests against a potential war based on disarming Iraq of supposed weapons of mass destruction. The US-led invasion of Iraq including UK forces started in March 2003.

Here was me thinking the world was becoming a safer place, Northern Ireland had calmed down, I'm at one the top military academies in the world and UK troops are sent to Iraq. You can imagine what was going through my head!

I passed out in April 2003, the PM Tony Blair was at my passing out parade because of the recent invasion, and I joined the RMP regiment. In June 2003, 6 members of the Royal Military Police were murdered in Majar Al Kabir, Maysan Province, Iraq.

My first posting was in Aldershot, my platoon was in Bosnia on Operation Oculus, a UN peacekeeping mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina with multinational forces, so I joined them. Our mandate was to contribute to the establishment of the rule of law by assisting in reforming and restructuring the local police. It was my first^t experience witnessing the aftermath of conflict and working alongside local communities to rebuild and restore peace.

By early 2004 I had been posted to Bulford to prepare to go to Iraq on Operation Telic IV with 1PWRR (1st Battalion, Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment). I found myself grappling with the moral complexities of serving in a war I didn't believe in. I knew this was coming, but nothing really prepares you to go on an incredibly hostile operation. I was deployed to Maysan Province which was where a year earlier 6 Royal Military Police had been murdered. It was a volatile tribal province, and our base was continually attacked with RPG's and other weapon and saw some of the worst attacks on UK forces during this time. We were sent there to train, equip and mentor the police service. We trained over 1,800 police officers. During my time there, I spent time negotiating with local tribal leaders. I was the only woman in these meeting, but they just treated me as a soldier. While I didn't agree with the war, I felt that the work that we did made a difference and the police service was in a better place afterwards. However, would we have gone to war if there had been a different leader, a female leader? Would we have made a different judgement call?

Ultimately, the UN inspection team found no evidence of weapons of mass destruction. Kofi Annan, the United Nations Secretary General at the time, called the invasion illegal under international law. His words are a poignant reminder of the importance of diverse voices in decision-making.

I left the Army to raise my family and got heavily involved in my community, first as a local parish councillor. I was then asked to get involved in a local charity that runs a recreational facility where the local football and cricket club play. The environment was incredibly male-dominated. Having been in the army, I was used to this. A year in, the then chair decided to step down and then asked if I would be chair. So male-dominated was the environment that at the meeting when the former chair proposed me to be the new chair there was utter silence, you could hear a pin drop. It was quite a bizarre situation. I had led soldiers in Iraq and here village politics in middle England found it difficult to have a female leader. I use this example because when we talk about peace and more women getting involved in politics, it's about women getting involved in all the rungs of the ladder whether it's the local village society or parliament.

Now I work as a fundraising consultant. Currently I'm working with the charity Every Casualty Counts which works with casualty recording organisations around the world. The charity regularly contributes to UN debates on casualty recording which ultimately leads to the better protection of civilians worldwide.

My involvement in politics has always been spurred by a desire to address problems in my community and a refusal to sit idly by when faced with injustice. It led me to the decision to stand for Parliament where today a mere 35% of MPs in Parliament are women.

Unfortunately, too many women are deterred from pursuing leadership roles due to societal norms and family responsibilities. We must challenge these barriers and create pathways for women to thrive in positions of influence and decision-making. It is not enough to simply acknowledge the importance of women's participation; we must commit to fostering an environment where women are encouraged, empowered, and supported in their journey towards leadership positions that support peace.

Together, we can build a future where women are not just passive observers but active participants in shaping the world around us. Together, we can build a future where women are active agents of change and peace.

Kati Systä

I'm joining the call today from Helsinki here in Finland, where the snow is gone, but we're still waiting for the spring to come. I'm a board member at the European level of Young European Federalists, also known as JEF Europe, of which YEM UK is the UK member. Taking up the the earlier discussion about saying sorry as a young person, my experience as a young activist has been that you have to push limits a bit. And it can sometimes be

easier to say sorry after the fact, than to ask first for permission. My activism started on a local level before I turned 18. And the trigger was an action to preserve a historical building in my home town, something which we did not manage to do. But it was my first push into making a difference in my local community, something that previous speakers have touched upon. Since then, I've got involved in a range of civil society organisations, associations, and a political party, and also internationally now in JEF Europe's Executive Board, and previously, also, for instance, as President of the Nordic Youth Council, and currently I'm working as an advocacy coordinator for the biggest youth organisation in Finland.

I wanted to speak especially about young women's participation and role in democracy, especially in the context of our ageing continent, but also in global terms as we are the biggest young generation ever. Young people and young women, especially, are not a uniform group. Not in the UK, not here in Finland, not in Europe, and certainly not globally: we have different visions and ideas of what good life is, different values and different views and dreams for our future. One thing that we have in common, though, is that our futures are threatened by a range of crises, the economic crisis, climate crisis, or wars and armed conflict, and we have not started these ourselves, but we have to struggle to get a seat at the table to resolve these, even though we live with the consequences for the longest.

Compared to women in general, according to Plan International, young women are even further underrepresented in politics. Of the 2.6% of world's parliamentarians who are under 30, only 40% are women, which is around 1% overall, and for young women belonging to marginalised groups and minorities, their representation is even lower, and their voices are clearly not heard in our societies. For young women, the representation in political policy making and decision making is very limited. And the the COVID 19 pandemic has had a huge and disproportionate impact on women's social and economic lives, and has put the limited progress that we had made at risk and threatens to reverse that progress unless we pay specific attention to addressing needs of women, and to including young women, something which, of course, is even more worrying in light of the political tendencies we can see all over the world, and also in Europe ahead of the coming European elections in June. These trends are accompanied by a rollback of girls and women's rights and gender equality on multiple fronts. There is a rise in an exclusionary politics characterised by misogyny and xenophobia which has also been an important factor in driving erosion of girls and women's rights. And what we can see within civil society is that socially

conservative forces are increasingly claiming civil society spaces. And among them, as mentioned previously, are groups who oppose reproductive rights and gender justice.

There are other factors that limit young women's participation, including legal limitations in some European countries which have a higher minimum age for holding an elected office than to vote. Then there are social norms which influence women to be less likely than men to think that they are qualified to run for political office, apply for jobs, and sometimes less likely also to seek competitive environments. These tendencies are enforced and shaped by societal gender norms and socialisation that we have experienced as girls and women. And thirdly, there is widespread violence and harassment against women who are in political office, running for office and otherwise active at different levels of society. I believe that everyone in this panel has some experience of this. There are some indications among young people and women, that we tend to retreat from formal modes of participation, whereas we might be more active in our local communities. Young people are very much interested in making a difference in our community and society in general, but not necessarily through conventional channels, such as running in elections or getting involved in political parties. Are we ready to accept this and adapt society and societies to ensure the future of our democracies? We at JEF Europe run an annual campaign called Democracy under Pressure where we highlight different challenges that democracies face, And this year, the focus was on the role of civil society, civil society organisations and activists as defenders of democracy, and we had many inspiring stories [add link?] from young activists from all over Europe.

One positive thing for our young women's participation has been social media and the internet. I know it can be a bit controversial to say that this is a positive thing right now, but it has played a key role in expanding the opportunities for girls and young women to participate and engage in politics, as well as creating new ways in which we can do so. But at the same time, of course, as you know, it has opened doors for new kinds of threats and harassment, which are aimed at silencing young women who have recently gained an opportunity to be heard.

So to conclude, I want to leave you with three points to ensure better and more inclusive participation of young women in political processes and peacebuilding.

The first one is for anyone and everyone: whenever you participate in political discussions

and forums, I would encourage you to ask yourselves who's not around the table, and raise the issue. If you're not comfortable doing it out loud, I would raise it with the organising team and also offer them assistance or your contacts, so that they can change it for the future and next time. Another action for everyone would be to encourage young people, especially young women around you, to voice their opinions. Making a difference in society can start from very small steps, speaking out about annoying local issues like a threat to tear down a beautiful old building in your home town. It can start just over a cup of tea, and having discussions at home.

Then, secondly, for elected officials or members and leaders of different political parties, I would ask you to you to ask yourselves those difficult questions within your group: Are we actively making sure that our youth wing of our political party is doing well? Are they growing our new leaders? Or are we creating structures in our activities that are preventing this? A second question to ask is, are we making sure that we nominate young candidates to electable spots? The same question can be asked also for women because there is a known tendency to nominate female candidates where the spot is known to be unelectable.

And these are quite crucial questions for each political party which can decide whether it will still exist in a decade or two.

And finally, for legislators and civil servants, the question would be, are you creating a space for young people, especially those below the current voting age, to be heard? I know there are different structures for making sure that young people can be heard. But sometimes this can just be a token exercise. So the second part of the question is, am I doing this just to tick the box that says yes, I've listened out for young people? Or are you actually making an effort to hear from young people from different backgrounds and take their opinions on board? And have you also gone back to those young people to let them know afterwards what's been done, and what difference was made by their contribution, because they are volunteers, and most likely won't get paid for their time that they spent campaigning.

Jane Morrice

You gave a bit of my personal story and I'm just going to explain a wee bit how I got

involved. But I think the most important thing is the answer to the question, how do you get women into democracy is that you do it yourself. And the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition did it, and I will show you how we did it. My background is I was born in Belfast, I was a teenager when the Troubles started, and all I wanted to do was get out. As soon as I finished university, I left, I went away for 10 years, I then came back to join the BBC in Belfast. And that's when I saw the Troubles up front. And that was a serious time. I was six years as a BBC reporter, covering the Troubles which I won't go into because it's too gruesome. After that, I wanted to do more. In fact, it was when my son was born, that I realised that I couldn't ignore it anymore, that I couldn't allow him to grow up the way that I had. So I first of all got the job of European Commission representative to Northern Ireland. And that was because I was already in Belfast and nobody from Brussels wanted to come because it was too dangerous. I got the job because I could apply from the outside. So I got the job and helped set up the peace programme, which is great. It's still going to this day, and the EU has put billions into peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. So that's huge, what Europe has done for Northern Ireland. Then, just as I was there, the Women's Coalition began. This is this is how it started. It was in the peace programme, that I got to meet grassroots women in Northern Ireland. They were working at the coalface trying to bring people together. And that was when I met them. Europe was giving them money to support what they were doing. And a group of us met, it was in 1996. Mo Mowlam by the way deserves huge recognition here. She became Labour's Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in 1997, the first female Secretary of State, and she decided that to get into the peace talks, the parties should have an election and the top 10 political parties would each have two representatives in the peace talks. And we decided with six weeks to go to set up a women's political party. To get into the peace talks, we had six weeks, we fielded 70 women, all over Northern Ireland. Most of us had never been involved in politics before, including myself. And in six weeks, we became the ninth political party in Northern Ireland and got two representatives in the peace talks. And those peace talks led to the Good Friday Agreement. That was in 96. And the Good Friday Agreement was 98. [showing document on screen] And I wrote one line in it, and my line is on page eighteen. And it says: "an essential aspect of the reconciliation process is the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society, including initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated education and mixed housing", Catholics and Protestants getting together. Overall, the Good Friday Agreement is all about peace, but it's not about reconciliation. And that's what that sentence was about. And we're still very, very far from that. Then after we got involved in the Good Friday Agreement, we got elected to the

Northern Ireland Assembly, and I got elected Deputy Speaker. And then it folded in 2003 because there wasn't decommissioning of weapons. And I turned my sights to Europe and got into the EESC [European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)] and became vice president. That was similar in some ways to the deputy speaker role; the only difference was, that there was quite a few hundred people working in the EESC. Everything was going according to plan during that time. I was also doing delegations to Afghanistan, talking to rural leaders, as we called them, on Turkey and Cyprus, and talking about the role of women in peacebuilding. So that was, that was a hugely important piece of work. Then, Brexit happened. And I was beginning to calm down in my campaigning and electioneering but Brexit and Boris, the two together, brought the fire back to my belly, big time, I decided that I wasn't going to let this lie. And I decided that, first of all, I wanted Northern Ireland to get a special type of status in the result. I don't say that I got what came to be called the Protocol, but I did fight for Northern Ireland to be in the Single Market and in the Customs Union, so that people now say we got the best of both worlds. So we have ended in a relatively lucky position compared to the rest of UK - sorry, for the rest of you. We got that, and I'm still campaigning for rejoining.

And folks, you can't give up on that. We've got to get the rejoin vote out there. And I know we're talking about women, but we need men. And in fact, Gina has mentioned here quite a lot about the need for men. The Women's Coalition wouldn't have got elected back in back in 96, if it weren't for the men voting for us. I've got two anecdotes for that. My postman arrived at the door, and he said, I'm voting for you and the Women's Coalition. And that told me, when men are voting for us, we're gonna get back. My husband, when I went home and told him we were setting up a women's political party, said, "What would you do if I set up a men's political party?" And I said, if for the last 20 years, the 20 representatives had been 20 elected men, which was the case in Northern Ireland, 20, seats, 20 years 20 men, I said, if those had all been women, instead of men, I would help you set up a men's coalition. But it was the total opposite, obviously. So now we're where we are today. I just want to say that we've got to keep fighting, we've got to keep campaigning, we've got to get together. And we've got to bring people with us. And we need men to support us. And we shouldn't exclude anyone, those were our Women's Coalition principles: inclusion, equality, and human rights. Those are the three principles that everything went by. And we had Catholics and Protestants with us along with atheists, we had card-carrying conservatives, we had communists in our party, and all of us together, crossing the divide in every direction. And that was us, that was our solidarity.

Someone else mentioned the importance of solidarity, that that's exactly what we need together, solidarity standing up with each other. And I'm sure that we are going to rejoin, by the way I'm giving it 10 years. So you know, women are rejoining. My final line, I like to keep myself brief, because that's I learned that from the BBC, my line is: Brexit isn't a divorce, it's a trial separation, to allow the UK and the EU to settle their differences and get back together for the sake of the children.

One more thing: I've just been appointed chair of the Museum of the Troubles and the Peace Process, a new initiative to set up a museum to learn the lessons and to work towards peace. I had to mention that because they'd kill me if I hadn't!