

“Greek Women in Positions of Power”

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Greece is a European nation without a strong tradition of feminism or gender equity. Though Greece was the birthplace of democracy, Greek women were not able to vote at the National Elections until 1952. The practice of obligatory dowries wasn't outlawed until 1983. Today, there are only 49 women in Greece's 300-member Parliament - ten more than in the last elections - and Greece routinely ranks at the bottom of female representation in government, trade unions, and political parties among the 25 nations of the European Union.

It will get a younger generation used to the idea of women in powerful posts. This said, let us see some really interesting and encouraging examples of Greek women in power in modern Greek History.

Greeks have gone through an evolution in society in the last years. It was said that in Athens, a woman could never be elected - this was proven wrong. Mrs. Dora Bakoyanni was elected Mayor. Indeed, since she took office, opinion polls have frequently named Ms. Bakoyanni as the most popular politician in the country.

1887-1888 Is the first year that the cry “ Women’s Right to Vote” is heard.

1895 The first female student was enrolled as medical student at Athens University. Unfortunately the student was harassed to such a degree that she committed suicide. This tragic event caused the Women Suffragists to intensify their efforts to demand votes for women.

-37 years later my mother graduated with a degree in Political Sciences from the University of Athens, being amongst the first Greek woman to acquire a university degree.

1924 At the National Assembly meeting, it is the first time that there is a decision to allow women to vote at municipal elections, although five years hence and provided that:

- they would only have the right to vote, but would not be able to be voted for by others
- they would have to be over 30 years old
- they would have to be literate i.e. They would have to be able to both read and write

1934 Women are called to vote at the Municipal elections of 1934. These are the first elections in the history of Greece, where women, even though they are under restrictions, have the right to vote.

As a result not more than 14,000 women were registered to vote and only 12,000 voted in the February elections. Amongst these only 2336 voted in Athens and 9500 in the provinces.

1952 Law 2159 establishes the right for women not only to vote at National Elections, but also to put in their own candidacy for election at municipal and parliamentary elections.

1953 Eleni Skoura (1896-1991) was the first woman to be elected for the Greek Parliament as a candidate for the area of Thessaloniki. Interestingly enough, her opponent was another woman, Virginia Zanna. Skoura garnered 46,650 votes while Zanna received 23,808 votes. She came from Volos.

1956 The first woman minister Lina Tsaldari is elected as Minister of Social Welfare. Also, the first woman Mayor is elected in the island of Corfu.

Now, before I go on to speak about Greek women in positions of power in modern day Greece, I must first mention two very important historical figures, who played a significant role in the Greek Revolution. Laskarina Bouboulina and Manto Mavrogenous.

Laskarina Bouboulina

Bouboulina was born in a prison in Constantinople, where her father was a prisoner of the Ottomans. Her father died soon afterwards and the mother and the child returned to the island of Hydra. Four years later, when her mother married Dimitrios Lazarou-Orlof, they moved to the island of Spetses. Bouboulina had eight half-siblings.

Bouboulina married twice (her first husband was Dimitrios Yiannouzas)

When her second husband Dimitrios Bouboulis, was killed in a battle against Algerian pirates in 1811, Bouboulina took over his fortune and trading business. She built four ships, including one large warship *Agamemnon*, at her own expense.

In 1816, the Ottomans tried to confiscate Bouboulina's property because her second husband had fought for the Russians against the Turks in the Turko-Russian wars. Bouboulina sailed to Constantinople where she met with the mother of Sultan Mahmud II who reputedly convinced her son to leave Bouboulina's property alone. After three months of exile in the Crimea, Bouboulina returned to Spetses.

She arrived in time to witness the fall of Tripolis on 11 September 1821 and met General Theodoros Kolokotronis. Later their children Eleni Boubouli and Panos Kolokotronis were married. During the ensuing extermination of the Ottoman garrison, Bouboulina saved most of the female members of the sultan's household.

After independence, when the opposing factions erupted into a civil war in 1824, the Greek government arrested Bouboulina because of her family's connection to the now-imprisoned Kolokotronis. She was eventually exiled back to Spetses. She had used all of her fortune for the war of independence.

Laskarina Bouboulina was killed in 1825 as the result of a family feud in Spetses.

Manto Mavrogenous

Manto Magdalena Mavrogenous; (1796 - July 1840) was another Greek heroine of the Greek War of Independence in 1821. A rich woman from Mykonos, she spent all her fortune for the Hellenic cause. Under her encouragement, her European friends contributed money and guns to the revolution.

She died in Paros on July 1840. To pay homage to Mavrogenous, the people of Mykonos have named after her Chora's central square where her bust has been raised. The Greek government has released several commemorative coins in her honor.

Kalliroti Sigano-Parren

Kalliroti Sigano-Parren was born in 1859 into a wealthy family and graduated from the *Arsakeio School* with full marks. She married Jean Parren, a journalist who founded the Athenian news agency of which he was the leader for many years.

Kalliroti Parren was the first in Greece to introduce the feminist principles, which had already shown up in Europe. As she thought that she could not achieve her purpose through scattered articles in already existing newspapers, she founded her own weekly "Women's Newspaper", which she edited until 1918 when she was exiled to the island of Hydra because of her political views.

The first issue was edited on March 8th 1887 and was almost snapped up, as 7000 copies were sold in a few hours in a capital of then 65000 inhabitants. Understandably she was met by a strong opposition from the editors of other newspapers, who attacked her in every possible way and called her "the anarchist".

Kalliroti Parren also participated in many international women's conferences, which inspired her to found various organizations.

In 1911 she founded the still working "Lykeio ton Ellinidon" (Upper Secondary School for Greek Women) with its declared aim to liberate women through systematic education. The school later evolved into an organization for women to which I belong since I was fourteen years old. It has opened branches all over Greece (and even abroad) trying to preserve and promote the Greek traditions (Greek customs, clothing, folk dancing, songs, handicraft etc.). The school received a prize from the Academy of Athens in 1939 for its great work, and furthermore it won first prize at the third World Festival of Folk Dancing in Mallorca in 1989.

Kalliroi Parren tried to influence politicians to give women the right to study at the higher educational establishments. She achieved her purpose in 1895, when the first female student was enrolled as medical student at the university. Unfortunately as we mentioned before, the student was exposed to harassments to such a degree that she committed suicide.

This tragic event caused Parren to carry on her work for recognition of women's rights. She now demanded votes for women. This did not however become a reality until 1924, and only for women of more than 30 years who were able to read and write as mentioned earlier.

When Kalliroi Siganou-Parren died in January 1940, she could look back on an active life with regards to the liberation of women.

Lina Tsaldari

Lina Tsaldari, a Greek politician, was the first woman member of a Greek cabinet.

Tsaldari was born in Athens in 1887, the daughter of politician Spyridon Lambros. In 1919, she married conservative politician Panagis Tsaldaris. After her husband's death in 1936, she became involved in charitable works and later entered politics, being elected to the Hellenic Parliament in 1956 and 1958 under the banner of Constantine Karamanlis' National Radical Union.

On February 29, 1956, she was appointed Minister of Social Welfare, the first Greek woman to hold a cabinet post.

Tsaldari died in 1981.

Melina Mercouri

Melina Mercouri, (born **Maria Amalia Mercouri**) (1920 –1994) was a famous Greek actress, singer, and political activist. She became the first female Minister of Culture in Greece in 1981.

The most important person in her early life was her grandfather Spyros Merkouris, who was mayor of Athens for many decades. Her father was a member of Parliament.

Melina became well-known to international audiences when she starred in the 1960 film *Never on Sunday*, directed by Jules Dassin. She was nominated for an Academy Award for this film. In addition, she and Jules Dassin collaborated on its 1967 musical stage adaptation, *Illya Darling*, for which she received a Tony Award nomination as well. Merkouri then went on to star in such films as *Topkapi*, *Phaedra*, and *Gaily, Gaily*.

During the period of dictatorship in Greece from 1967 to 1974, Mercouri lived in France. When the dictatorship revoked her Greek citizenship, she said, "I was born a Greek and I will die a Greek".

When democracy returned to her home country, she returned, and became first a member of Parliament for PASOK.

As Minister of Culture, she proposed the Cultural Capital of Europe ideal within the framework of cultural policy of the European Community. Athens inaugurated this institution in 1986, but most importantly, she advocated the return of the Parthenon Marbles.

She served as Minister of Culture from 1981-1989 and 1993-1994 and survived 16 government reshufflings of Andreas Papandreou.

Melina died in 1994 and received a state funeral equivalent to that of a Prime Minister. Shops and theatres in Broadway New York remain closed at the time and date that her funeral took place back in 1994, while the 6th of March, the date of her death, has been proclaimed by UNESCO as the Worldwide Day for Culture at which time the Prize by the name of 'Melina Merkouri' is handed for cultural achievements.

Vasso Papandreou

Vasso Papandreou was born in Achaia in 1944 and studied Economics at the Economic University of Athens.

Vasso Papandreou served as Minister for the Environment, Town Planning and Public Works from 2001-2004. She was also Minister for the Interior, Public Administration and Decentralization, from 1999 to 2001 as well as Minister for Development from 1996 to 1999.

She was appointed Commissioner of the EEC from 1989-1999. She was the first woman ever in the European Union to hold such a very influential and important post. She drew up the Charter of Social Rights for Employees and other social measures for EEC member states. Her duties covered a very large spectrum of important issues:

- Employment
- Social Matters
- Education
- Youth Matters

Due to her hard work and dedication she was awarded the prestigious medal *Legion D' Honneur* by Francois Mitterand. It must be noted that Vasso Papandreou is among the very few women politicians, who rose to power not through the influence of any political family ties.

Anna Diamantopoulou

Another strong woman, **Anna Diamantopoulou** was born 1959 in Kozani, Greece. She is a Member of Parliament in Greece for the main opposition party, the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK).

A civil engineer by training, Diamantopoulou's **political** career began early. As one of the youngest Prefects in Greek history, Diamantopoulou served the Prefecture of Kastoria for two years ending in 1986 with her appointment as Secretary General for Adult Education and later for Youth. She was appointed President of the Hellenic Organisation of Small and Medium-Sized Undertakings and Handicrafts (EOMMEX) in 1993 and left the position to become Secretary-General for Industry.

Anna Diamantopoulou's **parliamentary** career began in 1996 when she was elected to represent the district of Kozani. She was appointed as Deputy-Minister for Development in charge of privatisation and industrial restructuring, a position she left in order to become European Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, in the Prodi Commission, a post she held between 1999-2004.

Diamantopoulou has been very active in European affairs both from her position at the European Commission and since her return to Greece. A champion of women's issues and a staunch supporter of stronger, more competitive Europe, Anna Diamantopoulou continuously stresses the importance of balancing economic efficiency with social justice. She is currently Chair of the Party of European Socialists' Committee on the European Dimension of Social Europe and an active participant in Europe-wide debates on the future of European competitiveness, the constitutional treaty and social issues.

Elisabet Papazoi

She is a civil engineer who graduated from the National Metsovio Polytechnic University.

From 1982 to 1986 she served as Prefect of the Cyclades islands.

From 1987 to 1989 she was appointed Ambassador to Cuba.

She was the Deputy of Minister of the Environment, Land Planning and Public Works from 1993 to 1996.

She also served as Minister of the Aegean from September 1996 until February 1999.

She served as Minister of Culture from February 19, 1999 to April 13, 2000. For as short time she was appointed Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for European Community matters.

Marietta Yannakou

Another strong woman is Marietta Yannakou, a medical doctor, neurologist-psychiatrist and a politician.

She was born on the 6th of June 1951 in Lakonia. She studied medicine at the University of Athens.

She was elected member of the Greek Parliament for Athens, at the elections of 1993. She has also been elected as a member of the European Parliament during the European elections of 1984, 1989 and 1999. From April 1990 to August 1991 she served as the Minister of Health and Social Services.

Between March 2004 and September 2007 she was the Minister of National Education and Religious Affairs, but she did not get re-elected in the last elections, due to strong controversies about important educational issues during her tenure as Minister of Education.

Fani Palli-Petralia

Fani Palli-Petralia (born 1943) is a Greek lawyer, New Democracy politician and the former Minister of Tourism (2006-2007).

Born in Athens, she studied law at the University of Athens.

She served as Deputy Minister for Culture (1990–1991) and Deputy Minister for Health, Welfare and Social Security (1992–1993). She was Alternate Minister for Culture (2004–2006).

Her roots from her father's side originate from a great politically and historically important family, the Petralia family, which comes from the Prefecture of Ilia. The Petrallias family has a rich and important history which starts from the time of the Greek Revolution of 1821 up to the present day. The Petralias family had many representatives in the Greek Parliament and Fani's father was an important international figure in the areas of athleticism and the Olympic movement for many years and was a member of the International Olympic Committee for Greece. On the side of her mother, her roots originate from the island of Skopelos.

Anna Psarouda-Benaki

Psarouda-Benaki studied at the Athens Law School and pursued post-graduate studies in criminal law at the University of Bonn.

She is the author of several books on criminal law and has specialized in criminal law during her practice.

She has taught as a professor of criminal law at the University of Athens since 1978. In 1981, she was elected to Parliament on New Democracy's state deputies' list and has since been consistently elected to the legislature from Athens' first election district. In October 1996, New Democracy proposed Psarouda-Benaki for the office of Parliament president. In April 2000, she was elected as the fourth Parliament secretary. Following New Democracy's victory in the March 2004 election, Psarouda-Benaki was elected by a majority of deputies (163) as the first female Parliament president of the 300-member legislature, where she served till last September. She has previously served as alternate minister of education (1989), minister of culture (1989), alternate minister of culture (1990-1991), minister of culture (1991-1992) and minister of justice (1992-1993). She is married.

Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki

Of the women leaders, the most glamorous is Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki who headed the Athens Olympic Committee. Known simply as "Gianna" to most Greeks, she cuts a colorful and imposing figure - at once revered, hated, admired, and satirized. She came from relatively humble origins but her ambition and intelligence were the driving forces which led her to leading positions of power.

Angelopoulos-Daskalaki whose origins are from Crete, studied Law at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and in the late 1980s became actively involved in politics in Athens, initially elected municipal councillor and subsequently Member of Parliament for New Democracy. She strategically build her political future through careful planning, her own individual efforts and hard work.

Through her position as Member of Parliament she met and married the most influential and rich steel and shipping magnate Theodore Angelopoulos. After her marriage she began a family with him and in 1990 resigned as Member of Parliament in order to raise her children.

Thereafter she returned to political life as president of the Olympics 2004 Summer Bidding Committee and succeeded in bringing the Olympics to Athens. She was however excluded from the initial organization committee that would prepare for the games.

When the International Olympic Committee questioned Greece's commitment to the games and its ability to complete all preparations on time, Angelopoulos-Daskalaki was asked to return and was named president of the Organizing Committee. Under her watch competition facilities were completed, organizational and security issues were taken care of. IOC presidents Juan Antonio Samaranch and Jacques Rogge both credit specifically Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki for the tremendous success of the games, which made all Greeks around the world very proud and proved that the Greek spirit always prevails!

She is therefore credited with getting the mired Olympic Games off the ground, but also with using a ruthless approach to do so, which earned her the sobriquet "Iron Lady." But she injected more glamour into the role than the original Iron Lady, Margaret Thatcher. Ms. Angelopoulos-Daskalaki seldom appeared without flashy, form-fitting designer suits, diamonds, spike heels, and Cuban cigars.

Dora Bakoyannis

Dora Bakoyannis (née Mitsotakis) (she was born the 6th of May 1954) is the current Greek Foreign Affairs Minister and former Mayor of Athens. She was the first woman mayor of Athens and since February 2006 has served as Foreign Affairs Minister which makes her the first women ever appointed to a senior cabinet position in Greece. She is currently the highest ranking woman in the history of the Greek Government. It is a widely held notion among Greeks that she may one day become Greece's first female

prime minister. At a height of 6 feet 0.5 inches or 1.84 metres (declared by herself on national TV), she also stands out physically among her fellow countrywomen.

She is the eldest of four children of veteran Greek politician Constantine Mitsotakis, who was Prime Minister of Greece from 1990 to 1993 and leader of the country's conservative party, New Democracy, from 1984 to 1993.

In 1989, members of the "November 17" terrorist group assassinated her husband, Pavlos Bakoyiannis, then a Member of Parliament, as he entered his office building.

When her father was elected Prime Minister the following year, Bakoyannis served first as an Undersecretary of State, and then as Minister of Culture. She was elected three times as Member of Parliament for Evritania, and later for Athens, by a sweeping majority. When New Democracy lost the 1993 elections and her father resigned, she successfully ran for a seat in the Party's Central Committee. In 2000 the new leader of the Party, Kostas Karamanlis, appointed her shadow Foreign and Defence Minister. She is now married to businessman Isidoros Kouvelos.

In the summer of 2002, when Karamanlis was looking for a way to demonstrate his party's growing strength against the ruling Panhellenic Socialist Movement in local elections, he picked Bakoyannis to run for Mayor of Athens.

She successfully hosted the 2004 Olympic Games, and was the first woman to serve as mayor of a city hosting the Games.

In 2005, she was elected World Mayor.

Let us finish with on a more personal note:

My mother was born in 1911 and graduated from the University of Athens with a degree in Political Sciences.

At this point in time, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece, out of 561 serving diplomats, (almost a quarter) 153 are women, out of which, 17 are at the Ambassadorial level.