

Women underrepresented in decision mechanisms, says Mrs. Gül



0



First Lady Hayrunnisa Gül (Photo: Today's Zaman)
7 November 2013 /TODAY'S ZAMAN, İSTANBUL

Turkish women have progressed and are now more active in social life, but they are still mostly kept out of decision-making mechanisms, first lady Hayrūnnisa Gül has said.

Gül was interviewed by Marvine Howe, a former reporter for The New York Times and the author of “Turkey Today: A Nation Divided over Islam’s Revival,” on Sept. 6 against the backdrop of the Gezi protests. The interview was published only recently, in the Fall 2013 issue of Middle East Policy, a peer-reviewed academic journal published quarterly.

The first lady responded to questions on various topics from the veteran journalist, from headscarf bans to social responsibility projects.

Gül shared her opinions on the state of women's rights in Turkey. She emphasized that women in Turkey received the right to vote and to be elected to public office in 1934, long before many countries in Europe. She told Howe that women have become more active and that the number of working women continues to grow rapidly. But she noted: “This, of course, is not sufficient. It is not possible to say that women are actively involved in decision-making mechanisms. Women are underrepresented, especially in politics and the bureaucracy. We should have more ministers,

members of parliament and mayors who are women. The fact that there have only been two female governors in the 90 years of the republic should give us food for thought.”

She also praised Turkey's Law to Protect Family and Prevent Violence against Women, adopted in August 2012. “There are also new opportunities for women in education, health and employment, based on positive discrimination for women in many areas,” Gül said.

As the interview took place at the time of the Gezi protests, Mrs. Gül also offered her views on the protesters. She said: “Our youth did not experience the difficulties of the '70s, '80s and '90s and therefore perhaps do not recognize the value of our democratic and economic achievements. The youth who are in their twenties now were children 10 years ago, when the AK Party [Justice and Development Party] government headed by my husband as prime minister came to power. They cannot remember the days of high inflation. They cannot remember the period, before the AK Party, when there were state security courts and emergency rule in many provinces and the freedom of expression was so limited.”

She said Turkey has become richer and the situation of the country has normalized. She also expressed concern about the protests turning violent. “Protests are normal in democracies but protests should not be violent; they should be peaceful.” She said she was concerned about what she described as the “violence that we watched on the streets.”

In response to a suggestion from Howe that secularists claim that there are more headscarved women in the old part of İstanbul than before, she said: “On the contrary. There are no more headscarves than before; the headscarved women have begun to be more active and as a result of this, are more visible in social life.”

Keywords: women , underrepresentation , decision mechanisms , hayrunnisa gül , first lady , turkey , social life , economy , gender relations