Ladies and gentlemen, dear guests.

I invite you to exercise our imagination a little bit. Let us imagine that all that surrounds us would be just a half of it. Half a table to gather round, half a house to live in, half a tree.

Now imagine the world without women. How do you think it would be? It is a sad image, isn't it gentlemen? Now imagine the world only with women. Also a sad image, isn't it ladies?

Our world is in harmony only if men and women together exist and function as two halves of a singularity.

We all know that in many countries, unfortunately still many, one of the two halves, the feminine one, is just a quarter or even less. And we also know that no democratic society can function in a healthy manner if the political system and the public life are built on such an imbalance.

To ensure this vital gender balance means to eliminate the causes that generate imbalance. If it is about discrimination, lack of regulations, disinterest of the political parties and authorities, then we can intervene by public policies.

But what can we do when the women’s under-representation is generated by wrong mentality and education? What should we do when women themselves think they are not good for certain jobs and just resign in a cultural and social paradigm of
discrimination? Education in school and family, the prejudgements and mentality of a patriarchal society made them to distrust themselves and their chances. They lack the courage to compete with men and consider themselves not to be good for some areas traditionally assigned to men.

We need women in politics, in public administration, in Parliament, in business, in financial institutions in the same way we need men in education, culture, health system or other social areas.

We are all here electoral experts and it is natural to talk about gender imbalance regarding women’s participation in political life and electoral processes. The level of women’s involvement in elections reflects the mentality, the cultural level and the state of mind of a people.

In this matter, Romania is no exception from the European pattern, being under the average regarding the women’s involvement.

During the 50 years of totalitarian political regime, woman’s emancipation and equality of opportunity were only used as communist propaganda clichés. After the December 1989 Revolution, women started to gain access and make a name for themselves in business, mass-media and even politics.

A survey conducted by the Permanent Electoral Authority shows that the women’s presence in Parliament at present is twice as high as it was right
after the fall of the communist regime, but it is twice as low as the average of 27% in European Union member states.

The lowest representation of women in the Romanian Parliament was of only 3.7% between 1992 and 1996, representing 18 seats.

I have to stress out that in 2012 Parliamentary elections, the largest number of women candidates was in Bucharest. No woman ran as an independent candidate.

Although they are few in number, the women in the Romanian Parliament have overpassed their men colleagues in activity volume, fact shown by the parliamentary activity index. A recent study shows that the 65 women in Parliament have been more active than the 509 men in Parliament by 40%. Practically, the 11.5% women have a parliamentary activity index of 34, while the 88.5 men have a parliamentary activity index of 24, although there is no woman group leader.

Within the Senate, the difference is rather spectacular: the 11 women senators have proved to be by 78% more active than the 159 male senators. Within the Chamber of Deputies, the 54 women deputies were by 2% more active than the 330 men.

What does this difference between women and men in the Romanian Parliament prove? There is no need for the women to be equal in number with the men in order to prove their efficiency and competence.
The statistics I have just shown should encourage women to run in a larger number at the Parliamentary elections. Still, at the 2012 Parliamentary elections, only 340 women candidates were enlisted, representing 13.8% of the 2451 candidates. Only 20% of the women candidates were elected.

Two out of three students from the political science superior studies in Romania are women. Their dream of a political career ends just after they graduate. Political parties prefer male candidates because they are credited from the very beginning of having more chances in elections. The few women that are enlisted as candidates usually run for un-eligible seats.

As shown before, women are under-represented in our national Parliament. We have a positive situation regarding Romanian women representatives to the European Parliament. Following this year European elections, 10 out of the 32 Romanian representatives to the European Parliament are women, meaning over 31% and close enough to the average of 35.9% of women euro-deputies. Two of the Romanian women representatives were elected vice-presidents of the European Parliament, being nominated by the group they are part of.

The most obvious gender imbalance is found within the elected local public administration officials.
Following the 2012 local elections, only 116 women became mayors. It means that only 3 out of 100 mayors is a woman, representing 3.64%.

Some of the women mayors have been re-elected with a significant majority of votes. There is a woman mayor with 4 consecutive mandates. All these show that the members of the community were pleased by their former activity. Women re-elected as mayors proved to be hard-working, well organised and to know how to fight for the well-being of their community.

In conclusion, we can say that women’s representation in the structures elected by direct vote in Romania is quite reduced.

The judiciary system of Romania holds the first rank in women participation. Women of the High Court of Justice hold 85% of the judges’ seats.

That makes Romania one of the top European Countries in this matter.

The gender imbalance was visibly reduced in the Romanian public central administration. According to the online database of the European Commission, in 2012 women held 51% of decision-making positions in central public administration in Romania, much over the general average of 33% at the European Union level. It is also true we are talking about the middle management level, because the top management positions are still held by men.
As stated before, we can fight against the gender discrimination by new regulations, institutional instruments, public policies and even by imposing sanctions or administrative penalties. But mentalities and pre-judgements perpetuated in time and accepted even by women are the most difficult to fight against.

Romania, as a European Union member state, improved its internal regulations and now it has the necessary means to sanction any kind of discrimination, including the gender one. But all these are not enough to ensure the gender balance. We need joint efforts of all society factors in order to change peoples’ perceptions, demeanours and behaviours.

Increasing the rate of women’s participation in elections is a major concern and also a challenge for the Permanent Electoral Authority of Romania. In the Spring of this year we organised the international workshop “Women’s participation in elections”. I had the joy to ascertain that this topic gained the interest of electoral management bodies, elections experts and civil society representatives from all over the world.

The main aim of the workshop was to offer the possibility of a wide exchange of experiences. From this point of view we succeeded in having a picture of women’s participation in election on many continents. Those of you who participated in the workshop could observe how concerned some countries are about
women’s discrimination and how deep the need is for an intervention with clear solutions. We can find them together by learning from each other, by following success stories and by taking concrete actions in order to encourage women’s participation in elections.

We established then that EMB’s can and must take measures in order to convince women to be involved in a larger number in elections, both as candidates and as voters. It is important to underline that a major step forward to increasing women’s role in elections is their presence at polls. It is not normal that in a democratic society women don’t exercise their right to vote while other women, from many countries, still fight to earn this right. The same way as it is not normal that women, although outnumber the men, are under-represented as elected officials.

The main conclusion of the workshop organised by PEA was that a balanced participation of women in elections and in decision-making political positions is a mandatory attribute to any democracy. Achieving this balance should become a “must do” for the government and for the leaders of those organisations that play a major role in protecting and consolidating the democracy. EMB’s can determine the political parties to accept a women quota of enlisted candidates, by new regulations regarding the financing of the political parties or even by a new electoral law. For example, the Romanian law has a provision that allows an increased
public subsidy according to the number of seats gained by women candidates.

PEA intends to carry out a sustained campaign in order to stimulate women participation in elections. Our primary goal is to make women aware of the critical importance of elections and of the role they could play no matter how they get involved: voters, candidates, election officials or observers.

In my opinion, the EMB’s can play a decisive role in sustaining public policies to encourage the women’s participation in elections. A higher presence of women in decision making political positions will encourage other women to strongly rise from the ranks in public life. It will also send a message of opening to other fields less accessible for women now.

Yesterday I advanced an initiative to both ACEEEE Executive Board and General Assembly through which we should call up our EMB’s to a long term campaign of eliminating the gender imbalance and promoting women in politics. I truly hope that we will have a positive feedback on this initiative at our next meeting.

Thank you very much for your attention!