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Gender in the EU



The Future
of the Gender
Policies In the
European Union



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of the Gender
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Heinrich Böll Foundation
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Introduction

The newest publication of the Heinrich Böll Foundation's Regional Office in Warsaw contains contributions made at the regional conference "Gender in the EU. The Future of the Gender Policies in the European Union," which took place on 28 October, 2010 in Warsaw.

The beginning of the new term of the European Parliament (2009-2014) and the European Commission coincides with the fifth anniversary of EU membership of the countries from Central and Eastern Europe. During that period an entirely new internal dynamic has appeared within the European Union, influenced by conservative trends and backlash, together with growing euroskepticism. Some commentators have even indicated that there is a European identity crisis which is developing in old and new EU member states. The state of developments in the field of gender equality and gender policies at the EU level is, similarly, regarded as unsatisfactory. After the so-called "Golden Age" of the 1990s, when most gender equality initiatives – such as directives on equal treatment of women and men and community framework for gender equality – were adopted, there has been a kind of stagnation. The European Commission, under the leadership of Jose Manuel Barroso, preferred not to change the status quo and not to propose a new more progressive strategy. Until 2009 the EC was not able to present the draft of a new comprehensive antidiscriminatory directive. It was finally announced only under strong pressure from the European Parliament and NGOs from the EU member states. The Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee in the European Parliament, led by a conservative Anna Zaborska, was also unwilling to take more progressive steps. Despite initial declarations, the European Institute for Gender Equality, which was supposed to be set up in 2007 to support the EU institutions and EU member states in promoting gender equality and combating sex discrimination, has not begun its activities yet.

The impact of the EU accession on gender equality is perceived as ambivalent. On the one hand, gender equality issues have been solidified in political and administrative practice due to the implementation of the strategy of gender mainstreaming. Yet on the other hand, the introduction of EU solutions and standards has led to a change of the language used to address women's rights or gender equality. The equality and antidiscrimination discourse has replaced the discourse of women's rights, which may lead to the marginalization of certain demands (e.g. right to abortion, right to contraception etc.). At the same, it may seem that women's problems are being addressed. Therefore, it is characteristic that many women's organizations and social actors have changed their attitude towards the European Union, from high hopes which accompanied the EU accession, to more critical reflection. One of the interesting phenomena visible in the "new" member states is the development of the social critique of the EU project from a feminist perspective.

The authors of the publication point out that despite undeniable achievements of the EU gender architecture, its future depends on embracing new concepts, mechanisms and partnerships addressing the root causes of gender inequality embedded in the traditional mindsets, institutions, policies and practices related to the family, the society and the economic, social and political orders. The new European Institute for Gender Equality, within its mandate, could play an important role in this process as a hub for new thinking, research and networking, drawing on work already done by some governments, academia and civil society. Advancing an economic case for gender equality is a priority today, but as a “missing link” and a complement to, but not a replacement of, the moral case pursued within a human rights framework. Moreover, the authors emphasize that the European Union is not a ready-made structure or a complete political project. The EU is a dynamic organism, where people are constantly seeking answers to the most burning issues and challenges of the day. Therefore, instead of expecting the EU to help us to find solutions, we must confront the question of what kind of Europe we want and start formulating the answers.

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Dr. Ewa Rumińska-Zimny

Gender Architecture in the European Union: Achievements, Challenges and the Future

Introduction

The European Union (EU) has been pursuing the goal of equal treatment of women and men since the Treaty of Rome (1957). Today, the EU gender architecture, which consists of gender equality legislation, institutions and policies backed by resources, is considered one of the most progressive in the world. The EU is also a key player promoting gender equality worldwide. Its efforts contributed to, among others, the historical success of the women's movement at the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in Beijing and the adoption of the *Platform for Action* (1995).

During the “golden era”, which followed the Beijing Conference in 1995, the EU gender architecture has been strengthened through the adoption of new Directives, the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997), the Lisbon Strategy (2000), and finally, the improvement of gender legislation in new EU member countries during the accession process. In recent years, however, the progress has slowed down. The report of the Swedish Presidency (2009) on the Beijing + 15 implementation review in EU member countries concludes that “during the last five years, a lot has been achieved in the field of gender equality, but progress was slow.”¹

The present note looks into major achievements and challenges for the EU gender architecture and discusses future prospects in the context of the Lisbon Treaty and a post-crisis reality in Europe.

¹ Report from the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union. *Beijing + 15: The Platform for Action and the European Union*, (se2009.eu); see also: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe: *Regional Review of Progress, Beijing + 15 Regional Review*, 2-3 November 2009, ECE/AC.28/2009/3 (www.unece.org). Both reports are based on national responses to the UN questionnaire on progress.

Achievements and challenges

Views of governments, experts, civil society or EU bodies on the impact of the EU gender architecture range from assessing considerable to limited positive impact.² The summary of achievements and challenges is presented in table I.

Table I. Major achievements and challenges of the EU gender architecture

Achievements	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender awareness at the highest policy levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender sidelined in policy debates on key issues such as economic crisis and or longer term strategies (European Economic Recovery Plan- EERP; National Reform Programmes –NRPs)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender equality legislation; binding power of Directives regulating equal treatment in employment, social security, reconciliation of family and work, access to goods and services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problems with the implementation and interpretation of Directives, guidelines and targets by member countries, which decide how they will reach gender equality objectives. • Only one Directive in gender area adopted in recent years (2006).³
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening the EU gender architecture in the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) through moving beyond the objective of preventing discrimination to mainstreaming gender into all policy areas. • New European Institute for Gender Equality (2009). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problems with mainstreaming (political will, piecemeal approach, isolated measures),⁴ few incentives to mainstream gender into non-social areas, such as science and research, innovation, economics, external relations/ Neighborhood Policy. • Gender impact assessments –only one country uses this instrument in drafting new legislation; and only two countries in drafting new programmes/projects. • Long process between the decision to establish (2006) and open the European Institute; ambiguity of its position in the EU architecture and expected impact on progress.

² Sylvia Walby, (2004) "The European Union and Gender Equality: Emergent Varieties of Gender Regime", *Social Politics*, vol. 11 (2), Oxford University Press : 4-29.

³ On Equal Treatment in Employment and Occupation; it does not cover new issues but puts the existing provisions in previous directives on equal pay, occupational schemes and the "burden of proof" into a single text to enhance transparency and coherence.

⁴ *Gender Mainstreaming: How we Can Successfully use its Potential ?*,(2008) Warsaw: Henrich Boll Foundation; also *Gender Mainstreaming:Poland 2007*. Report, UNDP Warsaw.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainstreaming gender into the Lisbon Strategy (2000) –a EU framework for sustainable growth and full employment; common targets in the European Employment Strategy (EES) for female employment and equality of opportunities, open coordination of policies, monitoring and “peer pressure”. • European Pact for Gender Equality (2006) aimed at strengthening gender work under the Lisbon Strategy. • 15 member countries already reached 60% target for female employment rate (for 2010). • New measures adopted by some member states to reconcile work with private life (flexible work arrangements, tax credits and/or support for women returning to work etc).⁶ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most countries far from adopting gender mainstreaming in employment policies; mixed progress by country and target area.⁵ • Slow improvement in women's position in the labour market with jobs clustered at the lower end; persistence of pay gap, which reflects gender stereotypes, job segregation (vertical and horizontal) and corresponding wage structure, which penalise “feminised” sectors/occupations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EC Gender policy framework: the Road Map for Equality between Women and Men (2006-2010) reaffirms the dual approach (mainstreaming and focused actions); defines six priority areas with objectives, actions and resources; regular reviews of progress based on quantitative targets and benchmarks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In reality, equality objectives included only into some priority areas. • No instruments to assess EU spending on gender equality; gender budgeting remains at the stage of feasibility study (2008). • Only 4 member countries introduced gender budgets at national level.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress in gender statistics in terms of data (child facilities, time-use etc) and methodologies (reform of ISCO international nomenclature,⁷ ad-hoc modules in Labour force surveys); specific indicators for the BPfA adopted by EU (in 9 out of 12 areas);⁸ a new publication <i>Life of Women and Men in Europe</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak link between improved analytical capacity and policies, except for the area of employment, and, to some extent, social inclusion.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement of gender legislation in new EU member countries through EU accession pressure, strengthening the position of women's movements as partners of governments, access to EU funding and opening political space across borders.⁹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After accession, loss of direct pressure on governments; loss of financial support of non-EU donors; also top-down pattern of reforms of legislation.

Source: author's compilation based on *Report from the Swedish Presidency*, op cit; *Regional Review of progress*, op. cit.; and other sources.

⁵ *Joint Employment Report 2008/2009*, Council of the European Union, Brussels, 11 March 2009.

⁶ *Joint Employment*, op. cit.; Paola Villa and Mark Smith. (March 2009.) *The National Reform Programme 2008 and the gender of the European Employment Strategy*, report prepared for the European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Brussels.

⁷ Includes now more detailed categories for female-dominated occupations.

⁸ EU has not developed indicators for 3 areas: Human Rights of Women, Women and Media, and Women and Environment.

⁹ Silke Roth (ed). (2008) *Gender Politics in the Expanding European Union. Mobilization, inclusion, exclusion*. Oxford/New York: Berghahn Books.

From a longer-term perspective, the catalytic role of the EU gender architecture in promoting gender equality is generally recognised. The impact was made, among other activities, through:

- Bringing gender to the highest policy levels.
- Developing gender equality legislation through issuing EU Directives, which take precedence over national laws.
- Opening all EU policies to gender mainstreaming (the Treaty of Amsterdam, 1997).
- Identifying equal opportunities as one of the goals of the joint European Employment Strategy (EES) in the Lisbon Strategy (2000).
- Using mainstreaming (EES) and gender specific strategies (Road Map for Equality between Women and Men 2006-2010) to define policy directions and specific measures to be taken, backed by financial resources from the EU budget.¹⁰
- Improvement of gender statistics to monitor progress and using “peer pressure” to deliver results under open coordination method of employment and social policies.

Despite these achievements, there has also been criticism related to the impact of the EU gender architecture, especially concerning progress in member states. The criticism centers mainly on the weak implementation at the country level, attributed to the lack of EU executive power and instruments at the EU level. Systemic constraints, which make it difficult to address root causes of gender inequality under the traditional model of market economy, are also at fault. As a result, there is a gap between the formal (*de iure*) and real (*de facto*) progress, which could be illustrated by the achievements and challenges in the implementation of the European Employment Strategy (EES).

Achievements and challenges of EES

The 1993 *White Paper* launching the preparatory process for EES was gender-blind.¹¹ But seven years later, gender was included into the Lisbon Strategy under general principles and specific policies. Member countries were committed (Guideline 18) to “promoting life-cycle approach to work through the increase of female participation, reduction of gender gap in employment, unemployment and pay, better reconciliation of work and family life” and “the provision of accessible and affordable childcare facilities and care for other dependents”. Quantitative targets were set to reach, by 2010, at least 60% of the female employment rate and the provision of childcare by age group (coverage of at least 90% of children between 3 years old and mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age”).¹²

Progress in the implementation, as reported in the Joint Employment Report 2008/2009, however, differed by country and by area:

- 15 countries (out of 27) reported reaching the 2010 female employment rate target.
- Only 9 countries met the childcare target (for children under 3 years of age), with large differences among countries. While the formal childcare arrangements (for children under 2 years of age) cover 73% of children in Denmark, in Poland, so far, they cover only 2 % of children.
- The persistence of the pay gap was reported by all countries; and ranged from the largest pay gap in Estonia (30%) to the smallest gap in Italy (4%).

¹⁰ The Road Map is financed through the Community Programme for Employment and Solidarity (PROGRESS) linked with the EU budget 2007-2013. All other financial programmes also contribute to reach gender equality objectives (Structural Funds, Framework Programme for Research, Education programme etc.).

¹¹ *White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment* (1993).

¹² Childcare targets were adopted later by the Barcelona European Council. *Report from the Swedish Presidency...*, op. cit.

The weakness of the EU gender architecture in the implementation process is, in fact, built into the decision making system of the EU and the rule that the country's preferences continue to determine issues submitted to the executive powers of the EU bodies.

EU executive powers and weakness of implementation

The EU powers are determined by member states, which delegate competences on issues of their choice to the EU bodies. In general, these are economic issues, such as matters related to the custom union, trade policy, internal competition or monetary policy of the member countries of the Euro zone. The further we move away from economic towards social issues, the more the decision making power shifts towards member countries. Countries decide, for example, on matters related to internal security, national identity and religion or culture.¹³ The latter includes key areas of gender inequality, such as sexual preference, abortion and violence.

Gender, traditionally defined in social and cultural terms, falls under areas where the EU does not have direct competences. Countries have flexibility of interpretation, even for gender Directives, and can choose policies to follow guidelines and reach targets. The EU can use only "soft" power, including "peer pressure", to mobilise countries to implement joint policies.

The EU's "soft" power works through the open coordination method, introduced by the Lisbon Treaty for the implementation of the EES and the coordination of social policies. In the framework of the EES, for example, countries are obliged to formulate national action plans, based on joint Employment Guidelines, including those on gender, and then report on their implementation.

In practice, the open coordination method, however, is a relatively weak mechanism to exert pressure on member countries. This relates especially to the area of social policy, where the impact is largely limited to developing joint concepts, objectives, policies and exchange of information and statistics, organised by bureaucrats in Brussels, with a very limited participation of civil society.¹⁴

Key role of "conducive environment" at national level

Real progress at the country level depends on how key national actors use EU legislation and policies. Countries can comply with guidelines and reach targets, for example, through downward adjustments. Headcount data on the female employment rate target may show higher rates than data adjusted by working time (not required by the EU), as women usually work less hours (part-time, mini-jobs) than men.

This assessment is confirmed by a recent study of the impact of the accession process on gender equality.¹⁵ The study points out that a "conducive environment" was a major factor behind progress in, e.g., Spain during its accession process. In countries where there was no such environment, such as Poland¹⁶ or the Czech Republic, the impact of the EU gender architecture was based on the minimum requirement approach of conservative governments. In addition, the EU gender

¹³ Krystyna Michałowska–Gorywoda. (2007) "Zasady podziału kompetencji pomiędzy Wspólnoty Europejskie i państwa członkowskie", [in:] *Integracja Europejska*, Wolters Kluwer Business, Warszawa.

¹⁴ Agnieszka Chłoń-Domińczak, Jerzy Hausner et al. (2009) "Polityka społeczna w Unii Europejskiej", [in:] D. Rosati (ed). *Europejski model społeczny: Doświadczenia i przyszłość*. PWE, Warszawa.

¹⁵ Silke Roth (ed). *Gender Politics ...* op. cit.

¹⁶ Joanna Regulska and Magda Grabowska. (2008) "Will it Make a Difference ? EU enlargement and women's discourse in Poland" in Silke Roth (ed). *Gender Politics...* op. cit.

architecture was often criticised for the lack of attention and support to new member countries from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).

In these countries, the environment for gender equality has drastically deteriorated during the transition process with the return to traditional (also called “cultural/national”) values, the loss of women’s position in the labour market and the decline of the role of the state.¹⁷ In Western Europe or Scandinavian countries, the public sector played a key role in promoting and implementing equal opportunity legislation, serving as a model for the private sector. In CEE, on the other hand, cuts in the public sector resulted in the dismantling of the public childcare system, which was a step backwards in the institutional arrangements helping to combine work with private life.

The women’s movement, which was the main force behind progress during the accession process, has become fragmented and weakened its position in relation to governments and funding from non-EU donors. Many, especially small, NGOs disappeared after the accession process was accomplished. As a result, expectations of the women’s movement in Poland and in other CEE countries, as to the impact of EU accession on mobilising progressive forces to make progress in gender equality, has turned out to be too optimistic.

Limits of traditional market economy framework

The traditional framework based on neo-classical economy, under which the EU operates, limits the EU architecture in addressing the root cause of gender inequality, which is uneven sharing of paid and unpaid work among women and men.¹⁸

Historically, this framework has developed around the concept of paid work and monetary economy, once dominated by men. While men produced national income and wealth, women stayed at home providing unpaid work, which was considered “unproductive” in economic terms and excluded from national accounts. This logic was used to establish market institutions and policies, that is, a “male standard” of worker and citizen and formulate issues related to monetary (paid work) sector.

At present, labour market institutions, the welfare system or tax and pension systems embody these assumptions, despite a variety of market systems in the EU member countries. Under such a conceptual framework, progress is still measured by growth rates of gross domestic product (GDP) and per capita income, and economic objectives have priority over social goals. As a result, gender equality, defined as a social/human rights issue, is seen as a moral obligation, which carries economic cost in the development process.

Today, women increasingly share paid work with men, contributing to economic growth. They are still, however, as in the past, providers of unpaid, caring work within a household. The latter is the main reason for inequality¹⁹ and should be addressed through measures aimed at moving towards a dual earner family model as a standard for national institutions regulating the market economy, including labour market and welfare systems.²⁰

At present, this is not yet the case. *Guidelines on Employment* are designed, for example, to address, first of all, the problem of the shortage of labour in aging societies and not inequalities between women and men. Targets for childcare provisions are an exception, but, as already mentioned, their implementation is left to countries, which are required, at the same time, to keep their budgets in line with the EU conservative fiscal requirements (Maastricht criteria).

¹⁷ Ewa Rumińska-Zimny (2010 *forthcoming*) “Women’s employability in Eastern Europe and CIS”, [in:] *Gender Gap and Economic Policy*, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, New York and Geneva.

¹⁸ The EU is often called a “neo-liberal project” S. Walby “The European Union.”, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ “...the main reason for the gender gap in employment, is the presence of children, which has ‘overwhelmingly negative’ impact on the female employment rate (while the fatherhood still tends to boost male employment rates) *Joint Employment Report 2008/2008*, *op. cit.*”

²⁰ Jill Rubery et al. (2003) “Gender Equality still on the European Agenda: But for How long?” *Industrial Relations Journal* 34(5): 477-97.

From the point of view of the effectiveness of the EU gender equality architecture, defining gender only as a social/human rights issue and not an economic one, has at least two major negative consequences. First, gender equality is perceived as a cost (or constraint) from a macroeconomic perspective. Second, gender issues are clustered in the social area, where the EU's role is marginal, remaining outside core EU concerns and policies.

The current framework of the market economy limits thus the impact of the EU gender architecture. First, it makes it difficult to raise gender equality on the policy agenda. The agenda continues to be determined by the traditional mind set and practice, both at national and EU levels, which assume that growth and fixing economic problems come before payment of costs of gender equality. Second, it provides few incentives to mainstreaming ("social") gender issues into other policy areas, such as economic policies (e.g. budgetary, tax policies), science and research, innovation or entrepreneurship policies.²¹ Third, it makes it more difficult to develop measures addressing the root causes of gender inequality, which requires the recognition of the link between paid and unpaid sectors.

Future of EU gender architecture

The future of the EU gender architecture in terms of its impact on improving *de facto* equality depends on responding to challenges. More political will and "conducive national environments" are critical for further progress. This could be achieved, among other strategies, through increasing women's participation at the decision making levels and through the democratisation of the decision making process at the EU level, resulting from higher involvement of the civil society.

A major step forward would be to add an economic dimension to gender equality work in the context of the heterodox framework of market economy.²² This would help to re-think costs and investments into sustainable development, links between "productive" and "unproductive" sectors and, in consequence, institutions and policy priorities.

This would also change the perception of links between gender and economic growth -- from a "cost" to an "investment", making gender part of the core policy agenda. We have observed observe such evolution in the area of environmental protection. Considered a cost in the past, it is now widely acknowledged as an investment in sustainable development. Investments in "green economy" are seen, more and more often, as a boost to modernising industry and gaining a competitive edge in the global economy.

The economic case for gender equality is well documented and draws on women's contribution to: (i) the quantity and quality of employment: women are now a major source of additional labour in aging European societies; (ii) the consumption of goods and services due to the growing economic independence of women; (iii) fiscal revenues: women are net contributors to the welfare state, and (iv) the sustainability of social reproduction (smooth reconciliation of work and family) essential for growth, labour supply and public finance. It should be underlined, that when we move towards the heterodox framework, beyond the traditional measures of progress through GDP,²³ the benefits of gender equality expand in terms of reaching key development goals such as quality of life, well being, social cohesion, child education, elimination of poverty, violence, etc.²⁴

²¹ Recent review of NRP reveals that a gender perspective is not included, except the section on female employment, into national policies and measures to invest in human capital, promote SMEs etc. Paola Villa and Mark Smith (2008) *The National Reform*. op. cit.

²² Heterodox economics, also called humanist or feminist economics, proposes alternative ways of thinking on economics, critical to classical economics for, for example, narrowly defining goals (GDP increase as opposed to human development), ignoring "unpaid" (reproductive) sphere and miscalculating development costs (e.g., neglecting costs of gender inequalities, environmental damage etc). www.genderandmacro.org; www.boell.pl; www.wide.org; www.krytykaliteracka.pl; www.ekologiasztuka.pl/feministyczny.think.tank

²³ Recent report of the so called Stiglitz Commission discusses key arguments why we should go beyond GDP as a measure of economic performance in modern economy. Joseph E. Stiglitz, Amartya Sen and Jean-Paul Fitoussi. 2009. *Report by the Commission on Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress*, www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr

²⁴ Mark Smith and Francesca Bettio (August 2008). *Analysis Note: the Economic case for Gender Equality*. prepared for the EU, Directorate –General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. www.se2009.eu

Economic arguments for gender equality point out that gender equality pays off even within a neoclassical macroeconomic framework, and that, in fact, it is gender inequality, which is a cost to growth. This cost is measured by estimating losses due to the sub-optimal use of human resources, wasted returns on women's education and creativity or destabilization of pension system and public expenditure. An economic approach to gender issues is, albeit slowly, making its way to policy discussions, as seen at a ministerial meeting and a conference organised under the 2009 Swedish Presidency of the EU, which discussed links between gender equality, economic growth and employment, as well as recommendations embraced by the European Economic and Social Committee.²⁵

Recent changes, especially those related to the economic crisis and the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, carry some risks but also opportunities for the EU gender architecture. The adoption of the Treaty is expected to strengthen the women's movement, for example, through consolidating women's rights and promoting gender equality (links to Charter of Fundamental Rights), giving more power to the EU bodies (especially, the Commission and the Parliament), giving a greater role to the civil society (Citizens Initiative) and strengthening EU external policy (support for gender equality in neighbouring countries).

The post-crisis situation raises concerns regarding its gender impact, in terms of less attention to gender issues at the policy level due, among other factors, to tighter public budgets, threatening cut backs in "expensive" reconciliation policies.²⁶ It could be, however, also an opportunity to bring an economic case for gender equality to the debate on measures to be taken by member countries to address the crisis in a broader context of less confidence in policy prescriptions based on neo-classical economy, interest in exploring heterodox options and re-thinking development strategies, including the role of the state, public finance and private sector.

Developing new partnerships of the women's movement with, for example, economic ministries or the corporate sector, is essential for advancing gender equality. To do so, however, requires consensus on who should represent women. Should it be the "old-timers", the women's movement rooted in the feminist tradition, or "new-comers", organisations which are often outside this tradition but are actively seeking gender equality in specific areas? These are organisations of business women, entrepreneurs, professional associations (e.g women innovators) etc. reflecting a rapidly diversifying pattern of women's position in a society. It should be noted that there could be, indeed, tensions and conflicts of interests (and views) among organisations representing various constituencies, such as between business associations and organisations defending women's rights as employees, or activists with different ideological backgrounds (feminist versus non-feminist).

As gender is also a political issue, the rules of the game require the formation of alliances within and outside the women's movement on important issues. This is one of the keys to making progress. Thus, establishing common interests and consolidating the women's movement is a condition for getting results. The approach taken by the Congress of Polish Women (May 2009) is a good practice example. It gathered women from different political options and backgrounds to assess progress made during 20 years of the democracy, identify challenges and common political goals, such as the introduction of a quota system for women to level the playing field for women in political sphere and decision making.²⁷

²⁵ Swedish Presidency of the EU Conference, "What does gender equality mean for economic growth and employment?", Stockholm, 15-16 October 2009: *Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee* SOC/338, Brussels, 1 October 2009. www.se2009.eu

²⁶ Paola Villa and Mark Smith. *The National Reform...*, op. cit.

²⁷ www.kongreskobiet.pl

Conclusions and recommendations

In conclusion, despite undeniable achievements of the EU gender architecture, its future depends on embracing new concepts, mechanisms and partnerships addressing the root causes of gender inequality embedded in the traditional mind sets, institutions, policies and practices related to the family, the society and the economic, social and political orders.

The new European Institute for Gender Equality, within its mandate, could play an important role in this process as a hub for new thinking, research and networking, drawing on work already done by some governments, academia and civil society.

Advancing an economic case for gender equality is a priority today, but as a “missing link” and a complement to, but not a replacement of, the moral case pursued within a human rights framework. This could be done through:

- (i) Raising awareness and building partnerships for advancing an economic case for gender equality at policy levels drawing on the experience of environmentalist movement.
- (ii) Developing region – and country – specific arguments in the context of short-and long--term strategies to respond to the economic crisis and building innovative economies based on intellectual capital of women and men.
- (iii) Including economics of gender into academic curricula and training programmes, such as summer schools for economists, policy makers and civil society.
- (iv) Building networks between EU member countries and their neighbours to promote economic case for gender equality under the EU Neighbourhood Policy.

Ewa Rumińska-Zimny – is now back as a Lecturer to the Institute of International Economic Relations at the Warsaw School of Economics after taking a leave of absence to work with the UN. Over the last 15 years she held various positions in UN offices in New York and Geneva in analytical and operational areas. She conducted and coordinated research as senior economist at the Human Development Report Office working, among other with prof. Amartya Sen, Nobel Winner in Economics, in preparing reports on human poverty and on globalization. In 2000-2009 she was the Head of the Gender Programme at the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) focused on economics. She was responsible for the regional Beijing reviews (B+10), mainstreaming gender into UNECE work, regional contributions to global UN processes - MDG, Financing for Development (Doha Conference, 2008). PhD from the Warsaw School of Economics; Doctorandus - Sorbonne Paris I; Visiting professor at the Georgetown University, School of Foreign Service, Washington D.C. Member of International Association of Feminist Economist (IAFFE) and Gender and Macro International Working Group (GEM-IWG) coordinated by the Levy Institute and the Utah University (US). Her research/teaching areas: International Economics (trade and finance), Human Development, Economics of Gender, Transition process and socio-economic changes. Author of papers and publications. Most recent: Editor and co-author *Gender gap and economic policies*, UNECE, 2009 (forthcoming).

2.

Alexandra Jachanová-Doleželová

Good Policies – No Implementation

As the name “Gender in EU. The Future of the Gender Policies in the European Union” indicates, the conference¹ focused on challenges, perspectives and developments in the field of gender equality, faced by European institutions. In addition, the panel discussions were concerned with the main actors in the EU gender equality policy, their roles and the alliances they should build to strengthen gender equality.

It is not very often the case that the topic of EU policies and, in this regard, gender equality policies is brought out of the buildings of European Institutions (read: Brussels). Thanks to the Heinrich Boell Foundation, the topic was discussed in the CEE region, as it is necessary to bring the EU policies closer to citizens, especially on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the entry of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Slovenia² into the European Union in 2004.

The year 2009 is also the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.³ This moment, as well as the 15th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action⁴ in the year 2010 should serve as a moment of reflection for the European Union⁵ with regard to its gender equality policies and, as the WIDE

¹ Conference organised by the Heinrich Boell Foundation in Warsaw October 28, 2009.

² Estonia, Cyprus, Lithuania, Latvia, and Malta also entered the EU in 2004.

³ UN Convention adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 and entered into force in September 1981. More information about the Convention available, for example, on Karat Coalition website: CEDAW Convention – basic information: http://www.karat.org/op_cedaw/cedaw-convention.html

⁴ UN official document established on the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing, sets up strategic objectives for member state to focus on in regard to gender equality. More information on the UN website: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>

⁵ But also for United Nations member countries, as both of the agreements are UN documents.

Network⁶ points out, it should remind the European Commission and the member states about their “commitments toward gender equality and women’s rights in Europe and worldwide.”⁷

Besides several significant anniversaries,⁸ at the turn of the years 2009 and 2010, there are numerous breaking points in regards to the gender equality policies in the European Union. There are 35% of women in the newly elected European Parliament, which started its term in September 2009.⁹ As the new EU Parliament was appointed, Eva-Britt Svensson was elected as the new chair of the Women’s Committee. 2010 is a year when the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs should be fulfilled and a follow-up strategy is being prepared. In the same year the Roadmap for equality between women and men¹⁰ ends, with a new document being drafted. In 2009 the Lisbon Treaty was finally signed by all the EU member states.¹¹

In 2009, the Gender Equality Institute was established with Virginija Langbakk appointed as director. The overall objective of this institution is: “To contribute to and strengthen the promotion of gender equality, including gender mainstreaming in all Community policies and the resulting national policies, and the fight against discrimination based on sex, and to raise EU citizens’ awareness of gender equality.”¹²

Even though it seems that a lot is being done on the policy level concerning gender equality, implementation is lagging behind. There are a number of topics related to EU gender equality policy that deserve attention. Let me mention and explore in this text some of them, which I see as important in respect to gender equality legislation and implementation.¹³ I will also discuss the roadmap for gender equality and the strategy for growth and jobs. The text concerns EU gender equality policies targeted primarily toward the member states and their citizens. However, it is also important to mention that the EU is not a closed and isolated world, therefore it also has to focus on gender equality outside the EU, for example in regard to development cooperation.

Gender Equality legislation

Gender equality legislation has been developed since 1957 (article on equal pay in the Treaty of Rome). Over time, 14 European legislative texts (directives) on equality between women and men were adopted, mainly dealing with employment and social security. Lately, one directive focusing on goods and services was established.¹⁴ As far as antidiscrimination on other grounds is concerned, there are two directives based on Article 13 of the Treaty: These are: the Racial Equality Directive, which has a large scope of

⁶ Women in Development Europe – European feminist network of women’s organisations, development NGOs, gender specialists and women’s rights activists. (<http://www.wide-network.org>)

⁷ “Women’s rights under threat: the EU must ratify and implement CEDAW at last!”. WIDE. 2009. (<http://62.149.193.10/wide/download/cedaw%20statement%20final.pdf?id=1037>)

⁸ The centennial anniversary of International Women’s Day will also take place in the year 2010.

⁹ The number is slowly increasing (for example in the former EP there were 32 % of women), but has not reached the parity number yet – at least 40 %. More information: “EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS RESULTS 2009; REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN”. European Women’s Lobby. 2009. (http://www.womenlobby.org/SiteResources/data/MediaArchive/Newsflash/NF2009/Women%20in%20the%20new%20EP%20July%202009_EN.pdf)

¹⁰ 2006-2010.

¹¹ This text will not focus on the impact of the Lisbon Treaty on gender equality. To know more about this topic, read L. Bisio & A. Cataldi. (2008) “The Treaty of Lisbon from a Gender Perspective: Changes and Challenges.” WIDE. (<http://62.149.193.10/wide/download/Lisbon%20Treaty%20FINAL?id=653>)

¹² Presentation by Virginija Langbakk at the conference “Gender in EU. The Future of the Gender Policies in the European Union.” October 28, 2009. Warsaw.

¹³ As my experience on the EU level is mainly connected to being a board member of the European Women’s Lobby and as part of cooperation with Heinrich Boell Fondation, the text will mostly reflect my knowledge of their position on the topic.

¹⁴ Presentation by Cecile Greboval, Policy Director of the EWL at the internal seminar for EWL board members: “EU Gender Equality and Anti-Discrimination Legislation: Current Developments.” 26.01.2009. Brussels

coverage (education, media, social advantage, social protection, goods and services, employment) and the Employment Equality Directive, which forbids discrimination on the basis of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

In June 2008 the European Commission proposed a new directive forbidding discrimination on the basis of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation outside employment.¹⁵

The directive is waiting for some country to bring it up during that country's presidency in the EU and it has two main opponents: Germany and the Czech Republic. The directive decreases the hierarchy among discrimination causes, where sex and race were more protected than the others. However, there will be several questions waiting to be answered after the directive is passed: will sex discrimination be less protected under EU antidiscrimination law? How will multiple discrimination be covered? As the European Women's Lobby points out, there will be several areas, where discrimination based on sex will not be covered, and these are media and education.¹⁶

Multiple discrimination is not developed in the EU gender equality legislation. But the causes of discrimination usually overlap. Our socialisation in the society is not shaped only by gender, but also by class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, our position in the society is differentiated by age (women are often discriminated during their childbearing years and over the age of 50). It is important to stress intersectionality, as women are diverse. The EU gender equality legislation should also take into account discrimination in the media and education and should also include multiple discrimination.

In recent years, a tendency has emerged to put gender equality policy under the 'equal opportunities for all' policy. On the national level, there are two types of institutional solutions: having a gender equality unit and antidiscrimination unit or having a single system dealing with all types of discrimination. The general trend now is to combine the units.¹⁷ However, there is a risk that under the common equal opportunities for all legislation (especially when there exists only one common unit), gender equality will be given less attention. As it can be seen on the example of new member states, it is possible for gender-based discrimination to not be seen as similarly problematic as discrimination on other grounds. It cannot be a common recommendation for every member state to have a separate gender equality unit (as in some member states the equality unit is very well developed), but in the countries where gender discrimination is not very visible in public, it should be the case.

Implementation of the EU legislation in member states is not sufficient, for example, mentioning the Czech Republic and Poland - in the CR, the antidiscrimination bill has only been passed this year and Polish legislation still does not correspond to EU legislation. However, even if the law is in place, very often it is not used and publicly known.¹⁸ It is necessary to find implementation mechanisms, which the member states would be forced to follow. And even if the legislation in member states is progressive (as, for example, is now the case in the CR), the real situation is different and discrimination is even increasing with the economic recession. Therefore, the European Women's Lobby recommends to "set more effective mechanisms (e.g. a strategic plan) in place to hold MSs responsible for the broad implementation and public knowledge of legal measures on the national level, including women's NGOs at the national level and supporting their work in this regard."¹⁹

The recent economic recession has had a negative impact on gender equality. Women were already entering the crisis in a worse situation, with regard to their position in the society and on the labour market (discrimination, gender pay gap, lack of childcare facilities, etc.). In the time of the economic crisis increased discrimination can be observed (mainly targeted at mothers with children – returning from maternity leave, persons of retirement age, single parents); the gender wage gap has

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ According to Eurobarometer (2006) only 31% of Czechs are aware of their rights if they become victims of discrimination. "Discrimination in the European Union: Summary." Eurobarometer 2007. (http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_263_sum_en.pdf)

¹⁹ "European Women's Lobby Response to the Consultation on the Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006-2010 and follow-up strategy." European Women's Lobby. 2009. (http://www.womenlobby.org/SiteResources/data/MediaArchive/policies/Gender%20equality%20legislation/2009/EWL_CONTRIBUTION_CONSULTATION_FUTURE_ROADMAP_FINAL.pdf)

also increased (in connection with the fact that women are willing to accept worse conditions). In order to recover from the crisis, employers are using negative flexibility (temporary work with no social insurance, involuntary part time employment with less social protection, etc).²⁰ In the time of economic recession, the EU must make sure that gender equality is receiving sufficient attention.

The Roadmap for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 2006-2010

The so-called roadmap for gender equality was prepared by the European Commission in 2006 and "outlines six priority areas for EU action on gender equality for the period 2006-2010: equal economic independence for women and men, reconciliation of private and professional life, equal representation in decision-making, eradication of all forms of gender-based violence, elimination of gender stereotypes, promotion of gender equality in external and development policies."²¹ It is up to the Commission to achieve these objectives, in cooperation with member states and other actors.²² As the European Women's Lobby proclaims, the problem is that the document is not a binding policy document, but more a coordinating document based on "voluntary" inputs from individual Commission's services.²³ Therefore, for the future years the EWL, but also WIDE (Women In Development Europe) recommend the new document to be a "Strategic Action Plan for Effective Equality between Women and Men, with concrete commitments and strong accountability mechanism"²⁴ and what is very important, with an adequate budget.

The Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs

The Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs should fulfill its indicators in 2010 and a new strategy is being prepared. The follow-up strategy is called "EU 2020". Before discussing the new one, let me come back to the Strategy which was signed in March 2000. One of the indicators set up by the Lisbon Strategy, to be fulfilled by 2010, in order to create a more competitive and dynamic world economy, was increasing the rate of women's employment to at least 60%.²⁵ In 2002 the strategy was completed through so-called Barcelona targets, in which the European Commission called on the member states to "remove the barriers to the full participation of women in employment and to strive to provide childcare services for at least 90% of children between the ages of three and school age, and for at least 33% of children younger than three by 2010."²⁶

²⁰ Based on experience of Gender Studies, o.p.s., when doing gender audits for companies, but also the experience of other organisations and academics from the Czech Women's Lobby. For more information on the impact of the economic crisis on women see: "Women, the Financial and Economic Crisis - the Urgency of a Gender Perspective." European Women's Lobby. 2009 (http://www.womenlobby.org/site/1abstract.asp?DocID=2598&vIID=&RevID=&namePage=&pageParent=&DocID_sousmenu=)

²¹ "Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men (2006-2010)". European Commission: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=422&langId=en>

²² Ibid.

²³ "European Women's Lobby Response to the Consultation on the Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006-2010 and follow-up strategy." European Women's Lobby. 2009. (http://www.womenlobby.org/SiteResources/data/MediaArchive/policies/Gender%20equality%20legislation/2009/EWL_CONTRIBUTION_CONSULTATION_FUTURE_ROADMAP_FINAL.pdf)

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs. European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/growthandjobs/index_en.htm

²⁶ "Implementation of the Barcelona objectives concerning childcare facilities for pre-school-age children." European Commission. 2008. (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0638:FIN:EN:PDF>)

When preparing a new strategy, it is important to ask the question if the indicators given by the previous one have been attained. When speaking about employment of women, the indicator will almost be reached.²⁷ Yet, the Barcelona targets are far from being completed. According to the report on “Implementation of the Barcelona objectives concerning childcare facilities for pre-school-age children” only five member states have reached the target concerning childcare facilities for children under 3 (Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium and Spain) and five others (Portugal, Great Britain, France, Luxembourg and Slovenia) are closer to that goal. Most other countries are far from meeting the demand for facilities caring for children. In 2006 the Czech Republic placed twenty-fifth in Europe, that is last, with less than 2% of children under three years cared for in institutional facilities.²⁸

Firstly, the new strategy should define formal indicators and create mechanisms, which would push the member states to work on the fulfillment of the strategy. Secondly, the strategy should bring new indicators regarding gender equality - for example in regard to the gender pay gap – the European Women’s Lobby recommends asking for a European equal pay target, including serious monitoring.²⁹ The strategy document should also take into consideration what lessons have been learned during the crisis concerning the economic model and how the experience can be used in the future.³⁰

Conclusions and recommendations

In connection to documents mentioned in the text, it is necessary to point out that gender equality is not only about economy and growth, it is not only about employment, as the EU gender equality policies sometimes seem to suggest. Discrimination must be eliminated not because it hinders economic development, but because it deprives people of their human rights. It is important to monitor how gender equality is perceived by the European Union, as arguments related to economic development and growth or the demographic situation, ignore the simple fact that discrimination of women is wrong and that gender equality is a precondition of democracy. In addition, it is important to develop other fields of gender equality, beside the the sphere of employment and the labour market; such as violence against women, reproductive rights, political participation of women, eliminating gender stereotypes in education, media, etc.

Gender equality has not been reached yet at the European level. It is visible from the proportion of women in European Institutions, but the existing legislation and policies are still not sufficient. Even though there are several directives related to gender equality, the coverage is still not complete. In addition, the policy document related to gender equality (the Road map) is not a binding document, it is not even a strategy document, it does not cover any resources. There are several member states which oppose the development of gender equality policy and, more importantly, implementation of policies and legislation in member states is poor. Even though the member states³¹ have accepted the directives, there is insufficient knowledge about them and they are not used in practice. It is time for the EU to develop control mechanisms enabling the monitoring of how the member states implement EU law.

- The EU gender equality legislation should also refer to discrimination in the media and in education, and should also include multiple discrimination.

²⁷ 59.1% in EU 27 in 2008, but for example only 37.4% in Malta in 2008 (Eurostat: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&language=en&pcode=tsiem010&tableSelection=1&footnotes=yes&labeling=labels&plugin=1>)

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ “Report from the Issue Group on the Gender Pay Gap.” EWL General Assembly – 27-28 June 2009. Internal document.

³⁰ EWL internal (board members and secretariat) discussion concerning the consultation for post-Lisbon strategy.

³¹ And here I mean mainly the member states from the CEE region.

- The EU should develop mechanisms enabling the monitoring of the implementation of EU legislation in member states.
- The new Roadmap for equal opportunities for women and men should be a strategic document with an adequate budget.
- The strategy EU 2020 ought to create formal indicators and mechanisms, which would push the member states to work on fulfilling the objectives. Secondly, the strategy should include new indicators regarding gender equality.
- It is necessary to highlight in policy-making that gender equality is not only economic development, but also, and even more importantly, part of democracy and of human rights. In addition, the issue of gender equality is relevant not only in employment and in the labour market, but concerns many other spheres.

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3.

Women In Development Europe (WIDE)

Gender in the Institutions. Status quo or an Opportunity to Change?

Introducing WIDE

WIDE is a European feminist network of women and development organisations, gender advocates and women's rights activists with national platforms in 12 European countries, members from EU, CEE and CIS countries and more than 100 members from around the world. WIDE works in alliance with other women's rights coalitions and networks from Africa, Asia and Latin America, as well as from Europe. Karat is WIDE's regional platform in the region.

WIDE's work focuses on influencing and transforming EU and international macroeconomic, trade and development policies from a feminist perspective and developing alternatives to the dominant patriarchal, neo-liberal, and profit-driven economic and development paradigm.

WIDE wants to raise awareness of new global patterns of social exclusion, inequalities and movement of people impinging on women's rights and access to decent work and sustainable livelihoods.

By a feminist perspective we mean more than equality for women and men in the existing social, cultural, political and economic structure, we want structural change for a just and democratic model of society and governance, in particular we want a change in power relations between states, people, women and men, to build a people centered world.

WIDE's work is grounded in women's rights, focusing on women's economic rights as the basis for the development of a more just and democratic world order. WIDE's key strategies are networking, advocacy and capacity building.

What challenges in the field of gender equality are the new European institutions facing today?

We are in the context of global and multiple crises alongside with other processes – including militarisation as a mechanism of social control and religious fundamentalisms – and we clearly see that the gender equality and women's rights agenda is losing ground worldwide.

The crisis has huge social costs, and we see that EU policies currently put into place to curb the crisis represent a big step backwards for human rights and women's rights in terms of citizenship. We believe that with the reduction in social investments the whole project of a social Europe is at stake. Restructuring of the state is taking place but the model of a state operating as an enterprise investing in markets has not been overturned with the crisis.

During last years we have been witnesses of a progressive erosion of the social provisions associated with the welfare state as governments have sought to cut budgetary expenditures for health and care. The indirect effect has been to privatise many of the institutions and mechanisms of social reproduction.

Thus, care of the elderly and children and some aspects of health and other social provisions have to be privately paid for in the market, or carried out in the household, usually through women's unpaid labour.

In places where such welfare states do not really exist, for example in developing countries, the lack of public facilities and funding means that provision of care tends to occur through informal mechanisms that increase the unpaid work of women as main care providers. The current global and financial crisis is likely to intensify these trends and pressures.

So in the urgency of the crisis it appears that, to date, little attention has been given to ensuring that gender is taken into account when formulating policy responses. It also presents extreme dangers for retrogression in the forward momentum of women's social and economic empowerment. Structural adjustment, deregulation and privatisation have tended to reinforce women's economic and social inequality and have reduced the capacity of many national governments to promote and ensure women's rights to public sector programmes and social expending

In this context the EU faces important challenges to advance its core principles of social justice and human's rights, where gender equality and women's rights are rooted.

Challenges at policy level

The EU has had a strong commitment to gender equality since its foundation in the Rome Treaty in 1957, which was later reaffirmed in the Lisbon Treaty. Now, the EU must take a step forward and place gender equality and women's rights, which are assumed as EU core values and principles, in the centre of its economic and social policies.

Responses to the economic crisis require a change of the existing economic neo-liberal model of production and consumption, for a model that takes into account the reproduction of people and nature, where a just distribution of resources is at the center of concerns, where care work (mainly done by women) is valued, recognised and taken into account. Care and care work must be understood – not as prerequisites to economic growth – but as the centre of human life. This understanding can bring about a political and economic shift in priorities from moneymaking or consuming goods to creating new habits of being and living which are more dignifying and ethical. Women are neither victims nor instruments for economic growth; the goal of Gender Equality is a goal of justice.

The EU approach to gender in development in practice must avoid assigning women an instrumental role. The EU anti-poverty programmes, proposed to alleviate the impact of neo-liberal reforms, have shown a tendency to reinforce conservative views of the role of women in the family, giving rise to a language of vulnerability and exclusion connected to the notion of gender and survival strategies.

They argue that development needs women and that it is crucial to invest in them, and therefore they exploit the potential of women as caregivers. This is the argument used to promote the transformation of many women's organisations into "apolitical" service providers (i.e.: micro-credit, training, economic entrepreneurship), all of which are depending on contracts with the government or funding from development institutions, which results in the de-legitimisation of their own processes. The approach to gender equality in development policies should rather be grounded on women's rights and historical social inequality, which reflects systems and practices resulting in different forms of social inequality and discrimination.

At global policy level we need to stop speculative and high-risk trading and practices which gamble our food, pensions, public goods and basic needs on the financial markets. In the area of trade, we must stop the aggressive trade liberalisation regime and instead promote a fair trade agenda, which integrates social development, human rights and gender equality as its core values.

There is also the challenge of improving EU policy coherence. The principle of policy coherence of EU external policies is one of the foundational principles. A key pillar of policy coherence is adherence to internationally agreed upon social, gender equality and women's rights commitments. The EU has the challenge to deliver on its commitments to international human rights frameworks on women's rights and development, such as the Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW, the MDGs, and the ILO conventions.

Challenges at implementation level: from words into action

The EU's political commitment to gender equality is reflected in a number of legal and policy documents, including the Lisbon Treaty. Yet, there exists a significant lack of coherence and consistency between policy declarations and practice with regard to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.

Some of the main obstacles identified by WIDE practice and experience can be seen mainly in external relations policies, but that could be extended to other policies are:

1. Lack of financial and human resources.
2. Limited gender competence and commitment among staff members, especially at decision-making level.
3. Absence of political leadership and political will.
4. Lack of strong accountability mechanisms.

For the coming years, we need a real investment in gender equality and women's empowerment. The EU must ensure that policy responses to the crisis take into account the differential priorities and needs of women and girls and do not undermine the policies and plans that promote gender.

The EU must increase the resources (financial and human) for gender equality and equal opportunities between men and women. Numbers are important. As an example we have the money addressed to gender equality in development policy.

The funding made available to support the integration of gender equality issues into development cooperation is insignificant when compared with the resources earmarked for other horizontal measures. As the own Commission has acknowledged: "only 5% of the Development Cooperation Instrument funds for the thematic programme 'Investing in People' (2007-2013) are allocated to gender equality, that means 57 million out of 1 billion and regional and country strategy papers do not give an overview of budget allocation to gender equality since gender is only mentioned as a cross-cutting issue and thus no financial details are provided."¹ The EU provides over half of global aid it, therefore, has a responsibility to take a leadership role by radically improving the quantity and quality of its aid.

¹ EU Parliament Resolution of 13 March 2008 on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Cooperation.

The EU must deliver its commitment to put in place gender-responsive budgets for ensuring adequate resources for gender equality and women's empowerment.² Women must participate as actors, inside and outside of government, in macroeconomic policy formulation and implementation. Women must participate also in financial and economic institutions taking decisions on responses to the crisis.

Gender mainstreaming actions should be better tracked and measured in terms of resources and achieved results. The use of existing tools for gender mainstreaming in reporting mechanisms must be a compulsory requirement as should gender impact assessments of all new legislative proposals adopted by the European Commission.

There is a need of more coordination and coherence of services, both at European and member states level. In the case of the external relations and development policies this is even more necessary, as it is a domain that falls usually out of women's rights or equal opportunities bodies and organisations both at EU, national and local levels. National Women's Machineryes in member states must have the capacity and mandate to participate in external relations and development policies planning and budget allocations for gender equality and women's rights.

There await, ahead of us this year, crucial events in relation to Women's Rights: a) The 30th anniversary of CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) and b) The 15th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. The EU has a responsibility to make these events significant by committing to deliver concrete measures for advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment. These measures should not only apply to the EU, there is a need of solidarity and working together with development countries towards a global citizenship for men and women.

2010 will be the year also for the adoption of the new EU strategic framework for gender equality – the follow-up of the EU Road Map which is currently being drafted. WIDE considers that the Roadmap has been more a coordinating mechanism – not always successful in that capacity- rather than a binding policy document and has been relying basically on “voluntary” inputs from individual Commission services.

WIDE thinks the future EU strategy for Equal Opportunities must be stronger. It should no longer be a roadmap but a Strategic Action Plan for Effective Equality, with concrete commitments and measures, strong accountability mechanisms and a specific budget. It must have a strong chapter on EU external policies, including trade.

Are there any chances to overcome the existing status quo? The role of women's organisations

The value and importance of civil society and especially the contributions of women's organisations to policy formulation, monitoring and implementation must be recognised and supported by the EU through appropriate initiatives and actions: including the creation of political spaces for true policy dialogue and the extension of financial support for women's organisations.

Openness of EU institutions to dialogue with civil society organisations is an obligation and not a concession, even though in some cases it is presented as such.

Only through alliance building, can women's movements increase political pressure and influence on decision-makers at all levels and achieve the transformation. That is WIDE is working in coalition with different networks and platforms worldwide.

We must remember that gender equality is a goal of justice, which necessarily requires changes in power relationships. Frequently, the validity of gender as an approach aimed at challenging and changing the power relations between women and men is ignored and it becomes an empty concept, a mere technicality. The EU must go further in the strategy of gender mainstreaming than using it as a mere technical tool.

² Recommendation of the Committee on the Status of Women 2009.

The transformation of the social and economic relations required to achieve gender equality demands major changes in other power relations, such as wealth creation and distribution, political representation and an understanding of the importance of gender equality as a question of social justice among all the members of society.

We need to bring back to the agenda women's rights discourse and practices based on the ethics of democracy and economic justice.

Women In Development Europe (WIDE) – is a European feminist network of women's organisations, development NGOs, gender specialists and women's rights activists which as formed in 1985 in response to the Forward-Looking Strategies (FLS) developed at the UN Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi. WIDE monitors and influences international economic and development policy and practice from a feminist perspective. WIDE's work is grounded on women's rights as the basis for the development of a more just and democratic world order and the search for alternative approaches to the economic mainstream. WIDE enables members and partners to articulate alternatives to the negative impacts of globalisation, and makes feminist alternatives visible. Through the dissemination of our research and analysis, WIDE promotes gender equality and social justice.

4.

Adam Ostolski

The European Union, Gender Politics and Social Change

In the period preceding Poland's entry into the European Union – and I believe the point is also valid for other Central and Eastern European countries – people involved in the women's movement, and more generally the progressive part of public opinion, had very high hopes concerning accession. The EU was perceived as a source of high and ever rising standards of civilization, including the area of gender equity. It was not without importance that accession was also the closure to the process of systemic transition, which in many ways had shifted the relations between the sexes to women's disadvantage. The losses include, but are not limited to, abortion rights – there was also a whole array of changes for worse in the social and economic sphere. The massive unemployment of the nineties hit women harder than men, as did the process of closing down nurseries and preschools, or the state's withdrawal from refunding contraception. Cuts in public spending also increased the pressure on households, which were now forced to rely on their own – i.e. mostly women's – resources. To make things worse, the feminist movement did not find a credible ally in the political world. Many years of efforts to pass a law on equal treatment of men and women remained futile. If certain anti-discrimination measures were introduced in this period – as indeed they were in the labour code – it happened as part of the process of adjusting the Polish legal system to the *acquis communautaire*. In the process of pre-accession negotiations the European Union required that Poland's government report on the progress it was making in implementing the gender equality policy. Hence, it seemed obvious that more could be won, and that the gains would occur faster, if the struggle for women's rights was moved to the European level than if it remained focused on the national level.

Five years down the road of EU enlargement, the dominant mood is one of disappointment. The influence of European values on state legislation is not as great as it had been expected. Moreover, this influence was much stronger during the stage of negotiations that preceded accession, when the aspiring countries strove to make a good impression. The EU's bargaining power decreased as soon as the applicants had made it into the "club." During the very same period when national

governments of the new member states were paradoxically regaining some of their autonomy after accession, women's rights organisations began to feel they were losing their own autonomy: increasingly forced to align their aims and strategies with the wishes of their donors, they were also competing with one another for a limited pool of funding. In addition to this, during Barroso's term, the European Union itself was losing some of its earlier gender impetus. From the point of view of gender equality, the most visible symptom of this process was the paralysis that seemed to overtake the European Commission when it came to passing a broad anti-discrimination directive. But from an even broader perspective what seems more symptomatic is the lack of political will – both in the Commission and in the Council – to revise the posted workers directive. The verdicts of the European Court of Justice in the *Laval* and *Viking* cases of December 2007 meant that this directive was now in contradiction with the principle of equal pay for equal work in the same workplace, triggering the process of “race to the bottom” in the area of social and labour standards. Thus, the process of constructing a European social model not only ceased to move forward during the Barroso era, but was in fact showing signs of regress.

Given this state of affairs, we might do well to ask a few general questions. Is this simply a crisis of leadership (some have even begun speaking of a backlash) in the European Union? Are conservative forces engaging in a successful campaign to stop or even reverse some of the gains of the feminist movement? Or are we perhaps dealing with aspects of a broader phenomenon sometimes referred to as *gender fatigue* – society's impatience with the whole problematic of gender equality, a growing conviction that the problem is by now sufficiently regulated? According to Elisabeth Kelan, who has been researching this issue, many people believe that workplace discrimination of women is a problem that has been solved long ago, thanks to appropriate legal measures. Finally, what may be at stake here is the exhaustion of a certain strategy of pushing for women's rights – a strategy whose present embodiment is in the *gender mainstreaming policy* (based on the idea of including gender equality into the main stream of politics). We might also ask whether these various explanations are in necessary competition with each other, or whether they can be viewed as complementary. In other words, are we facing three separate challenges here, or three aspects of the same impasse – in European political institutions, in social attitudes, and inside women's organisations? Opting for either of these perspectives will carry different practical consequences. If the backlash in the EU, gender fatigue in the workplace and disaffection with gender mainstreaming within the women's movement are three separate independent phenomena, then the recipe for our problems would be to continue doing what we have been doing all along, only more effectively. If, however, we are dealing with various aspects of a single crisis, then we need to ask about its root causes.

I believe it worthwhile to consider the issue through the prism of a tension between two types of gender politics. On the one hand, there is the feminist movement, which represents the desire for comprehensive social change – profound reconstruction of relations in law and politics, in the economy and culture, in the family and practices of everyday life – change that would eliminate gender oppression. On the other hand, there is the actual shape of this movement as it has developed through history. At present, especially in Europe, feminist activism takes place through a number of women's organisations engaged in pursuing specific projects and pushing for particular demands as part of certain pro-women policies or legal regulations. The distinction between the ‘feminist movement’ and ‘women's organisations’ is mainly analytical. Its function is to help us articulate the difference between two disparate, though equally important forms of action, all the while keeping in mind that the same individuals or groups may well be – and in fact often are – involved in both types of activity simultaneously. And yet, each of these two forms of activism triggers a different logic of thinking about social change. The basic context for a social movement consists of other related social movements, all based on a vision of social transformation. The context for the activity of non-governmental organisations is, by contrast, the world of institutions – whether state, European, or international. The demands brought forth by NGOs are addressed to legislators or administration, and they need to be distinctive, i.e. separate from other demands. A specialised cell, a separate department, a plenipotentiary of one's own, a special law, a distinctive directive or international treaty – such things are evidence of success, as they bolster the significance of the issue that a given group of NGOs are engaged in. It is precisely the other way around for a social movement: its demands are vivid and distinct to the extent that they can be tied to the demands of other movements, because only then can larger numbers

of people be mobilised in their support. The broader the alliances, the better for the movement. NGOs construct women as a real or imagined interest group, whereas a social movement represents a certain dream or vision of a non-repressive community, rather than a distinctive group with a well-defined identity. Non-governmental organisations leave people the way they are, while trying to obtain for them a larger slice of the collective cake, along with fairer rules of the game. A social movement has a transformative dimension, so that its struggle is not just for change within laws and institutions but also for an alternative culture, for real change inside individuals and relations between them. For change to become possible, these two types of activism – organisations and social movement – must meet.

Viewed from such a perspective, today's crisis in gender politics appears as the effect of a certain imbalance: undue advantage of the bureaucratic logic of social demands, which are put forth and recognised, over the logic of social movement. It is increasingly difficult to perceive the promise of a non-patriarchal society in the endless stream of proposed norms and regulations concerning equal treatment of men and women. Meanwhile, legal norms in and of themselves have neither the power to create reality, nor to organise it. Legal regulations may gain real, concrete significance only thanks to social dreams and conflicts in which they are the stake. Anti-discrimination law will not gain a living content, unless it becomes part and parcel of a larger struggle for a certain new vision of the social world, and against a certain other vision. Efforts to pass a new directive might well become a step in this struggle, but no single law will change much unless it is accompanied by a stirring in the social dimension of the European Union. The changes that would have a positive impact include: a directive concerning public services (of benefit to the position of women); revisions to the posted workers directive (important from the point of view of equal treatment of employees). Finally, from the point of view of the European social model, we might call for some critical reconsideration of the Maastricht criteria, which fossilized the then popular neo-liberal orthodoxy in the early nineties. In this political context, efforts to bring about gender equality will not automatically improve the actual position of women, since it is equally possible to make adjustments upwards, as it is to make them downwards (sadly, the latter is by far the easier option). If you consider the lowest paid jobs, or the flexible forms of employment, you will see that here the gender gap in wages almost ceases to be a problem. Ironically, pauperisation of both women and men turns out to be the simplest – and rather bizarre – solution of the problem of discrimination. Fortunately, as we engage in action, even of the most specialised and specific kind, we are likely to be faced with questions: With whom? For whom? And what sort of world do we hope to build? As the women's movement answers these questions in its own way, it might well move the European project a step forward.

Translated by **Agnieszka Graff**

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5.

Agnieszka Graff

The Trouble with NGOs

Let me begin with a pledge of loyalty, since what I have to say may easily be received as an act of betrayal. Yet, I assure you, my loyalty is sincere while the trouble to be discussed is also my own trouble. Thus, I declare my friendship, loyalty and trust in a number of NGOs with whom I have worked over the years, whose publications and websites I regularly consult, and to whom I occasionally contribute money. My NGO home base includes Cultural Critique (Krytyka Polityczna), Feminoteka, the Stefan Batory Foundation, the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, the Federation for Women and Family Planning, eFKa in Cracow, Konsola in Poznań, and a number of other women's organizations scattered across Poland, which I have visited over the years. My list does not include March 8th Women's Alliance, as it is not a formally registered organization, but this group may very well be part of the problem, too, only in a way as yet invisible to me. In any case, it is from within the trouble that I speak to you, not from without.

The trouble I want to examine is the sorry state of what was supposed to be "civil society" but somehow never came into being. The post-1989 changes were accompanied by the dream of spontaneous grassroots mobilization of citizens, a major reconstruction of social bonds. Universal engagement for the common good, massive turn to associations, people taking action for a diversity of causes, creating communities of the like-minded, with common goals and commitments, but no desire to depend on state structures – such things were supposed to start happening soon after the demise of the old system. It had had a paralyzing effect on human initiative, but now it was gone. After the despised wall crumbled and the hideous curtain rose, we were to become active members of civil society. But somehow we never did.

"We dreamt of civil society, but all we got were NGOs" – this statement is attributed to Janos Kis, philosopher and dissident, one of the leading figures of democratic transition in Hungary. I have heard similar complaints from my frustrated activist friends in Poland. Such things are said by feminists and environmentalists, by people struggling for the rights of sexual minorities and those engaged in fighting anti-Semitism and racism in Poland. Opinions of this sort, however, are expressed in

a half-joking and slightly hushed tone, and never in public – criticism of NGOs is a topic fit for private conversation over a glass of wine, not for a press conference.

Clearly, we are having trouble with our trouble. We have difficulty naming it properly, awkwardly entangled as we are, in something that – perhaps – we ought to critically examine. We feel guilty, but we also feel loyal. And so we build up our defenses, clinging to each other. After all, we live in a country where influential politicians have stated publicly that the concept of civil society is foreign to Polish national culture. Hence, our critical reflection is left for later; meanwhile, we search for culprits outside ourselves.

My essay is not meant as a complaint against X or Y – this or that person associated with NGOs, negligent or dishonest. Such people no doubt exist, but that is hardly the point. The real problem is systemic in nature. It has a rather awkward name: it is referred to as “NGOization”. The debate over NGOization constitutes one of the key themes in contemporary feminist thought. In general terms, it is a trend that consists in the institutionalization of actions that should arise spontaneously at the grassroots level (and used to do just that – in the 60s and 70s). NGOization is also the excessive professionalization of what used to be called “activism”, and it is the fragmentation of social movements, their subordination to the neoliberal economic order. There has been no evil plot, no coup against the third sector’s cherished independence. According to many observers, the drama of NGOization is the effect of the turn away from politics – perhaps even towards an anti-politics. Such an attitude was inscribed into the very concept of civil society, as it was formulated by dissident communities of Eastern Europe in the 1980s. Rejection of politics made a lot of sense during the struggle against an oppressive system, but ceased to be effective after the democratic breakthrough. After 1989 the anti-political character of the so-called third sector turned out to have a stifling effect, it became the root of self-marginalization.

Non-governmental organizations emerged as the embodiment of a certain bold vision of justice, perhaps we might even call it a utopian vision. At their root is desire for profound social transformation. Yet NGOs abandon this broad vision, as they become engaged in their own institutional survival. They busily apply for grants, diligently learning to speak the language of bureaucracy; they strive to fulfill the requirements of the system, gradually forgetting their own anti-system identity. Unbeknownst to themselves, activists lose their once so valued independence – they function “from one project to the next”, gradually adjusting their own goals to those of their grant-donors. “There is no money around for the struggle against domestic violence? So let’s organize some workshops for the unemployed, because that is covered by the EU grant number 658/555...”. I admit I just made this one up. But I have heard stories just like it more than once. Then there is the almost ritualistic tale about conflict among NGOs. But what we must realize is that it is NGOization and not the supposedly quarrelsome collective temperament of feminists that is eroding the sense of a common goal among groups involved in the same field. Instead of engaging in co-operation, they become fierce competitors for a limited pool of funding. Last but not least, there is the problem of representation – the elephant in the room of NGOs. Since organizations are accountable to their donors, they tend to lose sight of the social groups that are supposed to be their constituencies.

Most NGOs came into being as efforts to bring to life certain political visions, but as they evolved into institutions they learned to avoid thinking in ideological terms. They became fluent in the newspeak of technocrats, leaving behind the language of values. Instead of talking about justice, they speak of effectiveness. Instead of repeating that equality is the cornerstone of democracy, they argue glibly: “equality pays off”. In short, former idealists have learned to talk the talk of neoliberalism, because this is the language of grants, projects and reports.

As we watch leftists abandon the ideals of the left, as though stricken by an allergy, it is worth realizing that contemporary religious fundamentalists suffer from no such affliction. They have no fear of ideology. And it is they who are effective today at mobilizing massive involvement, and channeling collective anger about inequality and injustice. This may well be due to the fact that religious fanatics speak a language of vision and values, and not a language of grants and reports. In any case, ultra-conservatism is far more successful than progressive foundations at attracting ordinary people.

It may seem odd that the religious right has somehow avoided NGOization, but this fact is acknowledged at international conferences by feminists from around the world: it is true in Catholic countries and Muslim countries, in Africa and Latin America. Poland is no different. There is no denying it: the strongest and most dynamic embodiment of civil society in today's Poland is the Family of Radio Maryja [Rodzina Radia Maryja]. With a membership of many thousand (135,200 members in 2007, to be precise) this populist and nationalist religious right organization is capable of mobilizing an army of volunteers or demonstrators at a moment's notice. Whatever our view of "neighborhood rosary circles of children" (an initiative of the Family), we must honestly admit that it is a real social movement: a massive grassroots effort that gives people a sense of purpose, a common goal. Polish conservatives may not be fond of the concept itself, but they know very well that what the Catholic Church has managed to build in Poland is civil society. "Is it not around Polish parishes that Polish republicanism – sometimes called by the foreign name 'civil society' – is blooming most robustly?" – Marek Cichocki and Dariusz Karłowicz ask rhetorically in the conservative journal *Teologia Polityczna*, a theme issue on Polish national identity.

It is increasingly difficult to imagine a world in which our – leftist – side of the political scene is the home of social movements – not the many scattered tiny foundations and associations we know today, but dynamic, robust social movements for change, ones that are both massive and internally democratic, equipped with a vision of a new and different world, not just an agenda for actions to undertake in the next few months. The fact that we cannot picture such a scenario is one of the effects of NGOisation. It is a process that leads to the atrophy of dreams, entangling former dreamers in diligent work for the very system they once wanted to change. Instead of changing the system, we are now servicing it.

There are several versions of the critique of NGOisation. A number of texts and public statements on the subject examine specific problems such as donor dependence, professionalisation and the related issue of activist burn-out, increasing bureaucratisation, or the deadly dynamic of internal conflict typically afflicting small self-enclosed groups. Without dwelling on the details of such analyses, I want to mention two arguments that challenge us to consider the broader interrelations between non-governmental organisations and the contemporary world order, that is the neoliberal hegemony of the era of globalisation.

Perhaps the most radical version of the argument is to be found in *Empire*, the famous book by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. Their critique is merciless, as they locate NGOs inside the logic of the total system of power they describe. They perceive NGOs as the soft arm of biopolitics, i.e. power understood in the Foucauldian manner, capable of regulating social life from the inside. Amnesty International, Oxfam or Doctors without Borders are to them mere instruments of the Empire, "frontline force(s) of imperial intervention", their moralism a mere smokescreen for what is really at stake.¹ The ideology of the world market and corporate capital, they argue, is now using the idea of "human rights", just as it has learned to use the ideas of "diversity" and "multiculturalism". Everything has been absorbed by markets; anything can be turned into a commodity. There is no escape from biopolitics, and we will certainly not find refuge from it in the embrace of such well-intentioned institutions as Amnesty International.

I admit I am not entirely convinced by the uncompromising vision of universal co-optation that *Empire* offers. I prefer the liberal version of the argument – one that acknowledges the spread of power and its new formations, but also assumes that some space of liberty still exists and is worth struggling for. We ought to note the fact that freedom is shrinking, as neoliberal mechanisms penetrate into realms that may at first sight appear independent. For instance, we ought to worry that the logic of the market place is now present in social movements committed to such ideals as human rights and gender equality. Such is the argument put forth by Barbara Einhorn in her study *Citizenship in an Enlarging Europe* (2007). In her view, after 1989

¹ "These humanitarian organizations are in effect (even if it happens against their participants' intentions) one of the most powerful pacifying weapons of the new world order – they are the campaigns of mercy, the mendicant orders of the Empire. These organizations engage in 'just wars' with no weapons, no violence, and no borders. Just as the Dominicans in late Middle Ages or the Jesuits at the dawn of modernity, they strive to know the universal needs and protect human rights. By means of their own language and their own actions, they first define the enemy as the lack of something (in the hope of preventing serious damage) and then treat the enemy as sin. (...) These NGOs are completely immersed in the biopolitical context of the constitution of the Empire..." (Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, *Imperium*, trans. Adam Kolbaniuk, Sergiusz Ślusarski, Warsaw: W.A.B., 2005, p. 51-52; eng. trans. A.G.)

Eastern Europe fell into the “civil society trap”. Instead of building progressive social movements for systemic social change, groups of activists (Einhorn’s focus is on feminists here) began patching up the gaps left by the neoliberal state, which was gradually withdrawing from various spheres of life. Feminist activists are thus reduced to the role of service providers: we were offering legal help to victims of violence, organizing workshops for the unemployed, setting up hotlines so that young people might learn how not to become pregnant, etc. The more we did such things, the less they were done by the state, because of the assumption that this is what NGOs are for. The resulting frustration is enormous, because these small groups, constantly struggling for survival, are of course unable to fulfill such needs as sexual education or support for victims of violence. As they strive to fulfill them, they become the object of growing demands and complaints. In the meantime, feminist groups lose sight of the transformative vision that lay at their root. And so the vicious circle continues.

The paradox of NGOization is that by giving their tacit consent to the service model of the women’s movement, feminists in fact legitimize patriarchy, leftists take on the role of a fig leaf for the excesses of capitalism, providing an alibi to the architects of the all-encompassing privatization. The dynamic was visible in all its grotesqueness when the success of the Great Orchestra of Holiday Help² (Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy) –inspired media commentators to argue that healthcare in Poland ought to be privatized. In other words, the state is there to serve the rich, while the poor should be left to NGOs. If you pause to think of it, you will see an astonishing situation here: people with the temperament of leftist dreamers are working hard to legitimize the withdrawal of the state from any responsibility over for the social costs of economic transformation. Is this what democracy was supposed to look like? Is this what we had in mind when we dreamt of civil society?

Regardless of whether we accept the strong or the weak version of the critique of NGOization, the conclusions are far from comforting. We may follow the grim view of *Empire*, or take up an argument such as Einhorn’s, which tries to take into account the neoliberal dynamic of the shrinking state, but still sees some sense in the efforts of those who try to counteract it – but in either case we will be forced to acknowledge our complicity in the process. By working within the NGO framework, we are not agents of political change, but a cog in the machinery of neoliberalism. Obviously, this thought is hard to accept. And so we resist it – we push it away, refusing to admit how far along we have wandered down the path of de-politicization and service-provision. Our trouble with NGOs is a problem of our own positioning within the power structure, but we continue to seek for culprits outside ourselves.

And so we go about complaining about the passivity of Poles, the arrogant indifference of politicians, about our own presumed tendency for infighting. How can one build civil society – we whine – in a society that is notoriously lacking in mutual trust, with people loyal towards no one outside their own family? The weakness of social movements in Poland is usually accounted for by the lamentable condition of Polish society. But can we dare a thought experiment that reverses this correlation? Perhaps it is precisely the type of activism we have to offer that alienates people who might potentially be interested in joining our efforts? What is it, after all, that we propose to people who share our views? There is not a single feminist organization in Poland of which one might simply become a member, and participate in its work according to some clear rules, without applying for a full-time job.

For years, our community has circled around the problem of NGOization, but no open debate has as yet taken place. By “our community” I mean feminists, leftist or left-leaning intelligentsia, those who are dissatisfied with the neoliberal paradigm of transition, and the privileged place of the Catholic Church in Polish public life. Now and again we sign our names under various protests: about the massive firing of employees by Lublin’s university (UMCS), about the neo-fascist groups gathering under the Dmowski monument in Warsaw, making “heil” gestures, or about yet another drama resulting from the restrictive anti-abortion law. Such is the extent of our “activism”. But when we “act”, we do not feel part of a social movement; we consider ourselves to be guests, or at best collaborators of various NGOs.

² Great Orchestra of Holiday Help (Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy) is a massive charity initiative, organised by Jerzy Owsiak, designed to aid Poland’s notoriously failing healthcare system by collecting money to buy medical equipment.

We do not like to talk about it. Perhaps we fear that our “trouble” might be used against us? I believe the real reason is different. An open debate about NGOization would challenge us to question the very sense of our existence in the public sphere within the present structural frame. The NGOization of social movements is a powerful process, a mighty self-perpetuating mechanism entangled with power relations of the contemporary world. We are all participants of these processes. Worse still, to a large extent we are their product.

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6.

Jana Cviková

Conflict and Cooperation

The title of this conference “Gender in the EU. The Future of Politics of Gender Equality” is quite broad and the preceding contributions have revealed a plethora of possible views on this aspect of EU politics. Initially, I was taken aback by the breadth of the theme; therefore, I welcomed my invitation to the second discussion panel, which had a more concrete title “Cooperation or Conflict? The Union, Integration and Women.” My interpretation of this title indicates that one of the key aspects defining the situation in Slovakia is productive tension between cooperation and conflict.

Previous contributions to the discussion have mentioned hopes of women’s NGOs in relation to EU accession and its implications for gender equality. I may say, both for myself and on behalf of ASPEKT, the first feminist NGO in Slovakia,¹ that we did not have any special expectations concerning EU accession. In fact, we were rather skeptical and wary about administrative and political approaches to the EU gender agenda in Slovakia. Before EU accession, our attitudes were based on two issues: our knowledge of the situation in the country and the lax approach of official circles to the gender agenda and cooperation with NGOs. Moreover, pre-accession talks and discussions paid almost no attention to gender equality. Just as it had been with the origins of gender discourse in Slovakia² in the pre-accession period, the issues of gender equality were brought up mostly by NGOs. The unique study “Gender Dimension of the EU Pre-Accession Instruments in Slovakia 1999-2004”³ (carried out by ASPEKT and supported by the Heinrich Böll Foundation) showed that national strategies and action plans for EU accession made no mention of gender equality and equality of opportunities. Sociologists Zora Bútorová and Jarmila Filadelfiová in their

¹ Officially established in 1993.

² See also Jana Cviková – Jana Juráňová: *Feminizmy pre začiatočníčky. Aspekty zrodu rodového diskurzu na Slovensku*. ASPEKT 2009.

³ Available at <http://www.aspekt.sk/download/genderaudit.pdf>.

report "Women and women's NGOs in Slovakia",⁴ written for the Heinrich Böll Foundation in 2006, argue that the attention paid to gender equality in reports evaluating the progress of Slovakia in the EU accession process (*Regular reports on the Progress of Slovakia in the Accession Process in the years 1998-2002*) was purely formal. In spite of this, the pressure of the EU had been stronger before the accession than after it: "it was sufficient for legislative change, but it was not sufficiently strong and lasting to change the views on gender issues and increase gender sensitivity in society. Therefore, hopeful legislative changes remained on paper."⁵

Our skepticism is mirrored also in the rather doubtful and provocative title of the international project "What Do Women Need the EU For?", which we carried out before the first elections to the EU Parliament.⁶ In the introduction to the conference organised as part of the project I admitted that this

"may be kind of a blasphemous question as we live in a country where EU accession was a desired goal – and for many it has been a symbol of the victory of democracy, the final defeat of totalitarianism, which in various ways has attempted to gain influence also after the revolution in 1989. This influence has been often consecrated by nationalism, so called traditional values and the like. In these years, the European Union has become some sort of a test of citizenship and democracy for those who laid they hopes for change on the 1989 Revolution. However, for a much smaller group of people, it also became a chance to foster gender democracy as a theme deserving attention 'from the top'."⁷

At the same time, I could not omit the fact that, as concerned the gender equality agenda, we in fact had no freedom of choice and were "compelled" to take the least critical and the most positive stance towards the EU and its policies. It was the only applicable tool we could utilise to solicit almost non-existent political will in the sphere of gender equality. It is worth mentioning that it was the NGO ASPEKT (and not official circles) which published the first two publications in Slovakia dealing with gender issues in the EU – a publication about gender mainstreaming as the EU strategy⁸ and the already mentioned "guide on the road to the EU."

Nowadays it may, at first sight, seem that the gender agenda in Slovakia is coming mostly from the European Union and that it focuses mainly on questions of employment and the labour market, but the origins of gender discourse from feminist foundations date back to the beginning of the 1990s.⁹ "At the end of the 1990s and in the beginning of the 21st century, before the onset of projects resulting from EU enlargement, four big themes had already become part of public gender discourse in Slovakia: violence against women, women's reproductive rights, rights of sexual minorities and participation of women in the public sphere."¹⁰

⁴ The full report is available at http://www.aspekt.sk/info_det.php?IDcentrum=303.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The project was carried out within the scheme of the Regional Programme of the Heinrich Böll Foundation for Women of Central Europe in cooperation with partner organisations eFKa Krakow, Gender Studies Prague and PSF Centrum Kobiet Warsaw. Jointly we put together a publication *On the Road to the European Union. A Guide Not Only for Women* (Slovak version ASPEKT 2004). Available at http://www.aspekt.sk/kniha_det.php?IDkniha=27. Moreover, each country organised an information campaign and conference about women in politics. In Slovakia the candidates to the EP participated in this conference; see excerpts from the conference Women in the Elections to the European Parliament available at http://www.aspekt.sk/info_det.php?IDcentrum=32&page=1.

Of course, formulating the question in such a way did not mean that we had been unaware of the non-existence of a homogenous political subject of "women" (after all, also the mentioned publication touched upon various concrete areas and groups of women), rather it was meant as an ironic comment on the discussion about participation of women in politics, which in Slovakia was often led in a stereotypical and non-conflictual way and asked about the "usefulness" of women in politics – "does/should politics need women". Therefore, we posed the question from an opposite angle: "what do women need politics for" and added some further questions such as "what does women's politics look like", "how is gender mainstreaming applied in decision-making" and others.

⁷ Available at http://www.aspekt.sk/aspekt_in.php?content=clanok&rubrika=19&IDclanok=83.

⁸ Barbara Stiegler: Ako uplatňovať rodové hľadisko. *Aspekty stratégie Európskej únie*. ASPEKT 2002.

⁹ See Jana Cviková – Jana Juráňová: Feminizmy pre začiatočníčky. *Aspekty zrodu rodového diskurzu na Slovensku*. ASPEKT 2009.

¹⁰ Zora Bútorová and Jarmila Filadelfiová in the report "Women and Women's NGOs in Slovakia"; available at http://www.aspekt.sk/info_det.php?IDcentrum=303.

In the 1990s, in the times of post-revolutionary construction and pluralisation of the public sphere in Slovakia, feminist and gender discourse was created as an open offer of NGOs to the (still) non-existent societal demand. And this emerging offer simultaneously helped create the demand. This kind of open “demand creation” was, after EU accession, transformed into more pragmatic reactions to demands (extremely by so-called donor oriented NGOs). This has resulted from changes in the access of NGOs to sources of funding and has often brought about not just wider promotion, but also devaluation of the gender agenda in society.

It is important to understand gender equality as a crucial part of the democratisation process - however, this has not been the case in Slovakia. A large gap between legality and legitimacy, which according to Czech philosopher Václav Bělohradský characterised the previous totalitarian regime, still exists.¹¹ Moreover, in our society plurality is still perceived as undesirable. Therefore, public cultivation of conflict is an important part of the democratisation of society. The gender perspective, which after the EU accession, has been coming from the “top”, has not become an object of productive conflict and neither has it found its firm place in our experience. In other words, besides its legality, the gender perspective has not yet gained its legitimacy in society, and hence it slides into empty formalism. This repeats the failure of socialist emancipation, which achieved a number of changes on the surface, but which did not reflect the roots of gender relations and thus barely touched gender stereotypes and gender power asymmetry.

As long as we avoid conflict and stick to strategies that maintain the status quo or strive for stereotypical “harmony” without conflicts, real change in gender relations will not be possible. It is, therefore, important that the discussion should not be limited to quantitative aspects of some already established themes regarded as “useful” - usually related to the labour market, but with very little analysis of its social context.¹² “Usefulness” cannot be the only measure of fostering gender equality. The context of human rights, which provides a broader perspective on gender equality, is also significant. It is hence important to cultivate a non-discriminatory public discussion about gender equality; one including and supporting also feminist stances.¹³ Yet, most significantly, gender equality should not become an empty instrument with no political content. Therefore, it is necessary to define and discuss political gender goals (which, in Slovakia, still do not exist), so that the gender agenda will not lose its potential of changing the existing inequalities, which could happen due to emptying of feminist concepts and their cooptation by anti-feminist discourse on gender equality.

I believe that it is necessary for the future of the EU to continually seek balance and productive tension between cooperation *and* conflict in formulating and realising gender equality goals. This entails cooperation *and* conflict in the work and reflection of NGOs, official institutions, politicians, media, the public, etc. In finding common solutions in and for the EU, it is also necessary to take into account the existing experiences (with women’s employment as well as with formalism) or the absence of such experiences (with democracy and public discussion) of post-socialist countries.

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¹¹ In the quoted report Bútorová and Filadelfiová summarise the situation by saying: „a significant gap between legislative changes and their implementation is typical for Slovakia.“

¹² See also further recommendations (related also to the EU level) in the analysis Equal Pay for Equal Work? Aspects of the Gender Pay Gap (English summary of the Slovak publication; ASPEKT 2007); available at http://www.aspekt.sk/download/summary_web_new.pdf.

¹³ See Recommendations, *ibid.*



Joanna Piotrowska

The Power and Weakness of Diversity. The Women's Movement in Poland

Any analysis of the women's movement in Poland will immediately show that it is remarkably diverse, constantly changing, and multifaceted. The (not at all numerous) researchers of this phenomenon underline the movement's internal diversity and the strength that comes with it. The available studies and reports propose various definitions of the women's movement. For some, it is composed both of organisations and informal initiatives that – be it in their written statements of purpose or simply through their actions – emphasise the idea of working for women and in the interest of women. Some groups, however, have never made such official commitments, but they nonetheless engage in activity that fits the description. There is also a category of organisations that work on projects addressed to women, but resist any identification with the women's movement, fearing the label "feminist". Then there are Catholic organisations or groups that run women's shelters or homes for single mothers, there are clubs for mothers, sports clubs, support groups, various hobby or discussion groups, and probably many other formations. In the data on the condition of the third sector¹ in Poland, which the Klon/Jawor Foundation has been gathering for several years, the category "women's organisations" includes all these diverse types of groups.

Impetus and enthusiasm

The women's movement in Poland took advantage of the opportunities brought by systemic transition: the right to form legal associations, establish foundations, as well as simply engage in the activism of informal groups. From the very beginning

¹ Registered non-governmental organizations are referred to in Poland as "the third sector", the other two being public institutions (first sector) and business (second sector).

of transition, women have been showing lots of initiative in undertaking actions for the benefit of their own gender. As is the case with the entire third sector, the largest boom in organisation building occurred in the years 1991-1996. According to Małgorzata Fuszara, “what influenced the emergence of the women’s movement [in Poland after 1989 - J.P.] were political initiatives directly concerning the sphere of women’s rights”. According to this scholar, one of the most important factors that sparked off activism was the proposed draft law to ban abortion.² Fuszara’s analysis is confirmed in recollections of early activists,³ for whom the prospect of a total abortion ban became the departure point for personal involvement. “I spotted a small announcement stuck to the wall next to the door of my neighborhood store, which read: ‘If you are against imprisonment as a penalty for abortion, join our demonstration next to the Copernicus monument. Saturday, May 6.’ [1989 – editor’s note]. This small piece of paper was to change my life” – wrote one of the activists in her memoir.⁴

Of course, what motivated women to become activists in the “post-communist” period was also their knowledge and experience of the ways in which women were being discriminated against: women’s unemployment, violence against women, marginalisation in politics. There was also the need to be among women, to speak in a similar dialect, to be understood, a new awareness of important issues linked to unequal treatment. Besides groups and organisations, a number of academic initiatives were created, i.e. gender studies programmes. This early period also witnessed the publication of the first feminist journals and books.

After 1996 the early enthusiasm began to wear off. We can observe that at this stage, instead of formal organisations, there emerged many loosely formed groups (sometimes arising within already existing organisations). Their aim was often short-term: to fulfill a specific and urgent need, to organise one or two events, a concert or a debate. These groups did not want to formalise their activity; the key value for them was simply the opportunity to meet, to act together, without formal definitions and structures. The fields of interest of such groups include abortion, health and reproductive rights, the labour market, the problem of traffic in women, domestic violence, women’s political participation, promotion of women and equal status of men and women.⁵ It needs to be underlined, however, that many organisations engage in several areas at once, depending on needs and capabilities.

“A wave of sophisticated books appeared, written by the first cohort of local feminists – books that did not shy away from humour, always offered a ‘good read’, were widely debated and nominated for important awards. They built foundations of new knowledge, interrogating the sources of women’s subordination in Poland”⁶ – writes Elżbieta Matynia. Agnieszka Graff points out that in this same period “next to academic feminism and the work of NGOs, a new form of activism emerged – heading for the streets, colourful, theatrical.”⁷ As can be seen from the above accounts, these diverse actions were accompanied by enthusiasm, creativity and real desire to find the best and most effective ways to improve women’s position in all areas.

This period also brought a certain “segmentation of the women’s movement”. The early groups, the ones that were active from the beginning, had selected specific areas for their activity. This caused newcomers to women’s activism to keep away from the fields already ‘taken up’ by a given group – they backed out, be it based on their own decision, or because they were actively discouraged. This was likely to happen especially when the group working in a given area was large and dynamic (comparatively so, given the size of organisations in the movement).

² Małgorzata Fuszara, *Kobiety w polityce* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2007), p. 219.

³ See: *Biuletyn OŚKa - Pismo Ośrodka Informacji Środowisk Kobietych 2 (11)/2000*, OŚKa Foundation, Warszawa.

⁴ Ewa Dąbrowska-Szulc, “Wspomnienia feministki ulicznej”, *Biuletyn OŚKa*, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

⁵ Małgorzata Fuszara, *Kobiety w polityce*, *op. cit.*

⁶ Elżbieta Matynia, *Demokracja performatywna* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej, 2008), p. 156.

⁷ Agnieszka Graff, “Świat nadal bez kobiet”, *Wysokie Obcasy* (58), 08.03.2008.

It is also worth noting that some people avoided women's rights activism due to the dearth of funding available for this type of work, or due to the fear of being labeled as a 'feminist'. However, in the 21st century, especially since Poland's entry into the European Union, this situation has gradually begun to change, a trend still visible today. On the one hand, there has been a rise in the emergence of small and dynamic informal groups, whose members have (sometimes) opted for formalisation of their activism, while on the other hand, many new foundations and associations have been formed. Some had plenty of experience in cooperating with existing organisations, which would explain their greater confidence in creating new structures (they simply had the know-how and experience required to do so). Another reason would be the need to create an autonomous space for activism, since the activists felt their ideas did not fit in the structures of well-established groups with years of history behind them.

Most of those new organisations, however, are still at a preliminary "set up" stage, with no office space of their own. They depend on the hospitality of larger organisations, and they are experiencing serious problems with acquiring both structural autonomy and some kind of regularity in their actions. What sets this new generation of groups apart from older ones is the enthusiasm of their engagements, the freshness of their thinking, new ideas and solutions, and the much greater difficulties they face when striving to acquire funding. They lack both the required experience and the earnings – two things of great value when applying for most grants (they are unable to contribute the required financial input). Another trend that can be observed is a certain "hushing up", i.e. the gradual fading of the activity, or perhaps of the visibility, of organisations that were set up in the early years of transition. At the root of this development is the shift in types of available funding that was brought by EU accession – which signalled the withdrawal of donors that had financed the activity of women's NGOs in the early nineties (while the Polish organisations assumed that accession would open the way to EU funding).

Only very few organisations could afford a stable kind of existence – the kind that is secured by an institutional sponsor. Without such a source, the existence of a group remains precarious: from one project to the next, constantly on the lookout for new sources of funding. A stable source of funding is crucial to an organisation's strength and public visibility, as it offers the time and security needed to properly engage in activity (instead of fundraising). Nonetheless, both in the early stages of transitions and today, most groups have managed to remain afloat, though often by changing the main profile of their work. This is a result of the fact that NGOs rely on funding awarded for specific projects, whose scope, theme and time of completion are all determined by donors. If in a given year an NGO manages to secure funding for a campaign against domestic violence, then this type of activity will become its major focus.

Gender equality – it brings profits

Since our joining the EU in 2004, one can observe a certain new trend: organisations that have never before shown interest in gender equality have begun to engage in women's rights activity. Without doubt, the decisive factor here is the broad stream of European Union funds flowing to Poland. This phenomenon has been a sore point with the community of activists involved in the field for many years, but now experiencing problems securing EU funding. Their expert knowledge of women's position in Poland and in the world may be enormous, their know-how in organising workshops, meetings, debates, and fighting discrimination may be remarkable, but these groups have a lesser fund-raising capacity within the EU grant system, simply because of their smaller size.

It may be controversial to say that organisations that reach for EU funding out of sheer financial interest (rather than out of an authentic need to counteract gender inequality) are nonetheless becoming part of the women's movement.⁸ Yet, regardless of one's ethical judgment of such actions, it is worth considering that in some cases these groups ended up introducing women's rights into their permanent agendas, becoming convinced about the need for such work. At this point, the availability of funding was not the only criterion. One could, of course, also come up with some negative examples and venture with an analysis of the situation, but we are still lacking credible data and analyses, whereas judgment based on individual observations might be unjust. This scenario also has two sides to it: women's organisations have been adjusting their actions to the themes of whatever grant competition happens to open at a given moment. As the majority of the grant announcements pertain to problems linked to the labour market, other areas remain neglected.

It is true that part of the women's movement had high hopes concerning Poland's EU accession. Such groups believed that once we joined the European Union, the attitude towards gender equality in Poland would change, if only due to implementation of laws and directives that member states are required to respect. "Women expected that such a European approach would become the dominant guarantee of justice for both sexes in the region and that the principle of *gender mainstreaming* would gradually bring about significant changes in mentality, especially among the Polish political class."⁹ Skeptical voices, however, could also be heard, expressing concern that "the change we can expect on May 1st 2004 might result in a significant weakening of the women's movement, and thus delay the implementation of EU's key strategy in the realm of gender equality, i.e. *gender mainstreaming*."¹⁰ Such fears were largely the result of the almost nonexistent interest of the Polish government in issues concerning gender equality, the open disregard of women's issues expressed by politicians.

Success and failure

Two decades have passed since grassroots initiatives were allowed in Poland, but the women's movement has still not built a strong organisation or forum that would – even to some limited extent – represent this internally diverse community. Most organisations, which define themselves as "women's groups" or "feminist organisations," are both small and scattered; at most, they create short-lived alliances with one another. I am not about to judge whether this is a good thing or a bad thing – opinions on the matter are in fact quite divided – but it may be due to this fact that we have failed in important areas: women are still lacking strong representation in Poland; there have been no cohesive, well-designed, strategic campaigns aimed against gender discrimination; there is no women's lobby in politics, no regular reports concerning the condition of the women's movement in Poland.

The rise in women's participation in politics, the presence of feminist themes and issues in mainstream media, and a number of publications and many books, some of which have become quite popular – these can all be counted among the unquestionable accomplishments of the women's movement in Poland. More recently – since the June 2009 Women's Congress – our successes and discussions have centered around the sphere of politics, since one of the demands of the Congress is to modify electoral law by introducing gender parity (50% quotas) on lists of candidates.

⁸ This issue was discussed in an article by Joanna Tokarska-Bakir and Anna Zawadzka. It dealt with the Gender Index project and its campaign addressed to employers, with its slogan "Równi pracy. To się optaca" (Equal at work. It pays off). The authors point out that this slogan "makes no use of the ethical argument for equality. Equality is just, hence it is your duty to introduce it even if it means that your business will lose some profits. Quite on the contrary, what is being said here is: introduce equality, and the female employees will feel better, which will make them do better work; their feminine skills will be of use to the whole team, so everyone will be grateful to you; happy workers are efficient workers. In other words: profit, not equality. If we are talking value here, it is market value, not moral value. Justice? No, cost-effectiveness." [J. Tokarska-Bakir, A. Zawadzka, "W co się ubiera nowa lewica?", *Gazeta Wyborcza* (122), 26.05.2007].

⁹ Elżbieta Matynia, *Demokracja performatywna*, op. cit., p. 150.

¹⁰ Jolanta Plakwicz, Anita Seibert, *Strategie równości płci w Polsce*, Warszawa 2003, available at the website: <http://www.feministki.org.pl/pl/raportmonitorujacy-pol.html>

“While many studies are available concerning women in the media, women on the labour market, or women who are victims of domestic violence, the movement has failed to build its own perspective on what has happened to women in general, how the political-economic changes were organised on both the material and the discursive level (...) and how this is linked to global restructuring.”¹¹ A similar point is made by Iza Desperak and Magdalena Rek in the report published by UNDP in Poland in 2007: “(...) it is difficult to find groups or organisations that would take it upon themselves to promote, in a complex manner, the policy of *gender mainstreaming* in application to the problem of poverty.”¹² The authors call attention to the fact that, as an effect, it is difficult to find examples of good practices in this area in Poland. What women’s organisations focus on instead is free legal and psychological aid, which “for poor women (...) is a significant source of support”. Nonetheless, such forms of action are certainly insufficient.

Translated by **Agnieszka Graff**

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¹¹ “Proposal for a feminist think-tank” cited after: K. Szumlewicz “Wątki lewicowe we współczesnym ruchu kobiecym w Polsce część II”, available at: <http://www.lewica.pl/?id=11489>

¹² Izabela Desperak, Magdalena Rek “Rozdział 6. Ubóstwo” in: *Polityka równości płci. Polska 2007*, UNDP, Warszawa 2007, see also section devoted to economics: “Kobiety i ekonomia”.

8.

Maciej Gdula

A New Opening in European Politics?

For almost twenty years two illusions played a huge role in Polish politics. The first one consisted in the belief that our problems would come to an end when we finally join the European Union. The second one relied on faith in the fundamental importance of civil society in the process of building a better social order. Today, there appears to be a perfect climate to shed both illusions.

Living with illusions

A politics worthy of the name – that is, an activity aimed at changing the status quo – can be practiced in two basic ways. The first way is to struggle for a radical break, by striving to eliminate whoever happens to be in the position of dominance. This is the strategy of killing the Father. Its greatest weakness is that, instead of the promised autonomy, it often delivers a mere change of places. Spectacular events that lead to pushing aside those in power may cause a general conviction that radical change has taken place, while in fact all that happens is that the formerly oppressed take over the throne and proceed with the business of power as usual.

The second way is to part with illusions. Illusions are cognitive schemata, spells cast at reality, apparently obvious truths that explain the world to us and delineate the horizon of action. A long time ago perhaps they did offer satisfactory answers to current challenges, but eventually they lost their value, stiffened and today they hide more than they reveal. Illusions are not limited to individual imaginings; they acquire the status of natural ways of viewing reality, confirmed daily by newspapers and television. A successful parting with illusions requires favorable circumstances and a collective effort aimed at unsettling the obvious, at creating a need for new ways of defining the world. When this happens, a chance for politics emerges: the sort

of politics that goes beyond mere place swapping, but is instead an activity aimed at building new frames for collective action, better suited to existing challenges and able to provide a greater number of individual subjects with a sense of participation.

Saying goodbye to illusions is far from easy, because remaining under their influence has its own rewards – what one gains is a sense of control over reality. Readymade “good explanations” and “balanced opinions” free us from the burden of cognitive effort, and allow us to feel part of a greater community. To bid farewell to illusions is to throw oneself into deep waters, risk frustration, and face the need to define anew both one’s enemies and one’s friends.

Without doubt, among the most widely shared illusions is the illusion of the European Union. We continue to consider it as an embodiment of normalcy, our only chance at advancement. The EU is the home we return to after years of homelessness, a comfortable place with all the rooms set up in a rational way, a well-stocked fridge, the furniture selected with taste. The only effort required of us would be to step inside. Beyond the threshold is where normal life begins, the life we have missed so badly. Is this vision naïve? Of course it is, but let each of us recall how often we thought or said that this or that would surely improve once we enter the EU. This was one of the magic spells uttered, saving us from worries about the actual circumstances surrounding the problem. No need to ponder on the most adequate solutions that would solve our problems – all we need to do for things to become normal is wait for our turn and then enter the European Union.

The illusion of civil society is similar in shape to the illusion of the European Union. When something is lacking, malfunctioning or falling apart we can always say it will improve vastly when civil society at last develops. Civil society has come to embody our dream about an authentic society – one that takes matters into its own hands and organises its life without the mediation of artificial institutions. All it would take is some self-organising, and all our problems from poverty to dog poop on pedestrian walkways should become a fading memory. People know what is best for them; people know how to take care of their own concerns.

Both these illusions are in fact based on a longing for normalcy. One normalcy would come to us from the outside in the form of standards and procedures, and another one would emerge from the ground upwards, an expression of spontaneous social activity. In neither case is it particularly necessary for us to take responsibility, because both “up there” and “down there”, we are sure that “they know what they are doing”. What counts far more than the actual content of this knowledge is the place where it originates.

Thinking about women’s rights was for a long time also colored by illusions, which forced us to seek chances for change either in the pressure of the EU or in the activity of associations and foundations, or better still in both these sources at once. It is, however, increasingly clear that one cannot count on solutions from the outside or from the grassroots in matters of gender equality, or, for that matter other areas linked to emancipation, such as rights of sexual minorities, separation of church and state, or social inequalities.

Parting with illusions

Today’s favourable climate for parting with illusions has several causes. As far the European Union is concerned, the obvious cause for disillusionment is the very fact of accession. Once you have been inside for some time, it becomes increasingly difficult to accept the argument that blames all our problems on not having been in the EU long enough.

Secondly, it is now visible that the EU is not a static embodiment of rationality, nor is it a ready-made structure to join if you want to be counted among the fortunate. The EU is a dynamic organism, where people are constantly seeking answers to the most burning issues and challenges of the day, such as the problems of ecology, patent and copyright law, migration, or the shaping of the world order. If we were hoping for a vacation from history, then we have come to the wrong travel agency. To continue with our view of the European Union as an external mechanism that implements all the right rules, is to gradually

lose all influence on the world around us. Instead of expecting the EU to clean up our mess, we must confront the question of what kind of Europe we want, and begin to recruit allies with a vision similar to ours.

Thirdly, to shed illusions about the EU is to acknowledge that it does not have equal interest in matters concerning the economy and those that have to do with ideology or worldview. When what is at stake is the violation of the flow of goods, or the breaking of some rule concerning state subsidies, one can rest assured that a relevant committee will step in promptly and decisively. When, on the other hand, a certain state (such as Slovakia) violates the rights of ethnic minorities, or a certain country (say, Poland or Ireland) maintains a draconian law concerning abortion, or when democracy in one of the member states (such as Italy) degenerates into a mere façade – in such a scenario you might at best expect some signs of concern. The European Union is weak when it comes to defining a normative spine of the community, and much better at remembering to secure “favourable conditions for business”. Given this reality, it takes quite a lot of good will to harbour progressive illusions concerning the EU. The EU will guarantee a certain minimum only when its citizens want it to do so.

As far as civil society is concerned, twenty years of efforts to build it in Poland have resulted in remarkably meager effects, and there is little to suggest that another twenty years of riding in the same tracks will bring about radical change. Despite the emergence of various institutions, Poles remain unwilling to engage in social action, do not trust each other, and are far more eager to take care of their families than of their local communities. Moreover, there is an increasing awareness of the fact that self-organising may well include commitments we do not like, such as fundamentalism and xenophobia (with radical groups such as Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski [National Revival of Poland] or Radio Maryja). In such cases the second sector may turn out to be a salvation from “authentic social activity” of the third sector.

The demise of the civil society illusion has a lot to do with the professionalisation of the non-governmental organisations – a process that makes their work increasingly similar to the functioning of the commercial sector. Formalised procedures that must be followed when obtaining funding for projects, precise budgeting, the need to adjust one’s agenda to that of the grant-giver – all this takes NGOs further and further from social movements and subordinates them to the existing status quo. Instead of building mutual co-operation and engaging in a debate on common long-term goals, associations and foundations compete with each other for people and resources. The grant system promotes professionalisation and enforces specialisation. This severely limits the un-paid spontaneous involvement of people who want to be activists only part-time. The result of this process is the emergence of a network of institutions that are more and more tied to their sources of funding and less and less in touch with real social problems.

What kind of European Union, what kind of society?

The question remains: what in place of illusions? It will not do to simply claim that the reward for parting with illusions is life in truth. Shedding illusions may easily open the gates to cynicism, or to a sense of hopelessness. Then all we would have in place of a false hope would be the bitter taste of resignation.

There is, however, another path we could follow. This alternative does not have the aura of simplicity that marks our twin illusions – the expectation that the world be set right by the European Union and by Civil Society. It does not offer such a promise. The new rules can only be worked out when we feel inside ourselves the power to define principles without taking recourse to a construct of a normal West or a natural society. Our world is contingent, but not every contingent reality offers the same kind of life.

The present challenge to those European citizens who do not feel at home in the EU, because they are still not free, or because they refuse to consent to the policy of exclusion and locked doors, is the challenge of finding a new language in which to talk about existing problems. This new language ought to provide a way to combine old demands with new ones,

to propose an intelligible formula of connecting common dreams and interests. This may sound abstract, but is not at all far from reality.

The most recent significant protest movements in Europe have been focused on higher education (student and faculty strikes), questions of patent and copyright law (The Pirate Party in Sweden) , and finally on the question of immigrants (strikes in France). The issues at stake in each case may seem disparate, but are in fact linked by the fundamental category of access. Regardless of whether we are speaking of higher education, health, culture, the environment, or state borders, we are touching the question of barriers and openings in access to common resources. Access is what connects different demands and creates the hope for a politics that will avoid cynicism and hopelessness. Renegotiating the limits and ways of participating is also an opportunity to build new alliances and reach compromises that are not betrayals of values. What may appear to be a lost cause, can be viewed in a new light thanks to the category of access, and suddenly gain a chance in real politics. Why should this not be the case with abortion, for instance? The right to abortion can certainly be redefined as a question of access to safe healthcare regardless of the content of one's wallet.

What we gain in place of the sense of security provided by illusions is a politics of uncertain alliances and a struggle for access in a variety of areas. Admittedly, this vision lacks the simplicity of the promise of a return to Europe. But then let us remember that the Europe to which we hoped to return never really existed. Moreover, today we do not have any better options.

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