

# **Overcoming Boundaries – The EU Enlargement Process and Visions of Europe from a Women's Perspective**

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## Summaries of the lectures

### **Access to Gender Equality in East and West**

#### **Approaches to Gender Equality: A European Perspective**

*Prof. Dr. Ute Gerhard*

The aim of this paper is to outline briefly the history of the European women's movements in their struggles for equality. The achievements of the women's movements will be depicted with specific reference to the three dimensions of citizenship - political, civil and social rights. The main focus will be on the comparison of gender policies and women's rights in West and East Germany since 1949, and a critical feminist understanding of equality. Finally this paper will provide an outlook on the European Union as a union of common law and its significance for women.

#### **Polish women at the threshold of EU accession**

*Prof. Dr. Bozena Choluj*

Even today, political and economic decisions are generally made without considering women as an interest group. It would seem that any hope of changes being brought about in the course of Poland's accession to the EU are largely illusory. For, if Poland's particular character as a family-oriented country with its own traditions, the role of woman as mother will be sacrosanct. It was only after the elections of 2001 that the Government office of the Plenipotentiary for Gender Equality was established and Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka appointed to the post. The effectiveness of her activity is however severely limited by the fact that it is not backed up by gender equality legislation. Her work has been supported by women's organisations, which have however gained significance only during the course of negotiations on EU-accession. By signing the UN Beijing World Conference on Women's "Platform for Action" the Polish government committed itself to co-operation with NGOs. The concept of gender is central to the Platform's recommendations. Suspecting that this concept is really designed to legitimate homosexual minorities, the Vatican has adopted a very negative attitude towards the entire idea. This in turn has influenced politicians' approach to questions of women's rights so strongly that the originally looked-for co-operation with women's organisations has been largely neglected.

From these first attempts to introduce the gender guidelines in the EU member states it can be seen that in actual democratic practice, the concept of gender can become hijacked so that in the end, redistribution of resources between the sexes will only be slight. Because of this it would appear that action programmes for women will continue to be necessary. The NGO movement is currently the best school for democracy and accordingly the most important forum in which to formulate women's interests and goals.

## **Review of the Current and Future EU Member States**

### **a) Labour Market and Social Politics**

#### **Social Policy and Labour Market**

*Helena Bednarova*

Brno is the second largest city in the Czech Republic with a population of over 370,000 inhabitants (174 863 men and 195 279 women). The age structure in Brno is characterised by a high proportion of senior citizens. In comparison with other Czech cities/regions it is obvious that Brno is ageing faster than the population in other Czech cities. While in Brno the senior citizens currently represent 20,5% of urban population, the national average is 18,4%. After 1989, a transformation of social policy began, and has been accompanied by new social phenomena such as social inequality and unemployment, instability in family life (increasing number of single-member households with unprovided-for children as well as a high divorce rate, a decline in marriages and more children born outside marriage), and - in some cases - dependence of families or individuals on social benefits. Social care for needy families with children, the elderly, handicapped, unemployed people and socially unadapted individuals is provided both by Brno City Municipality, by 24 City District Offices and 10 municipal contributory organisations that provide social services according to social welfare legislation. The range of services targeted at needy families with minor children comprises counselling, legal protection of children, financial and material subsidies for families whose income is lower than the minimum living standard guidelines, counselling targeted at problem children and young people, foster family care and the Social Care Department also administers a residential facility for single mothers with children. A significant part of activities in the field of social welfare is covered by 36 NGOs which receive grants from the city budget every year.

As early as 1990 the process of transition from the socialist system of planning to a market economy began. This process has been accompanied by significant changes in labour market structure: labour shifted from the primary to the tertiary sector; structural changes; reduction of demand in the internal as well as the external market; and change of ownership relations due to privatisation and restitution. In comparison with Prague, there is less foreign investment in Brno and the city also has to cope with the so called "branch syndrome". However, as the second largest city in the Czech Republic Brno has the advantage of being the seat of institutions of public administration, education, health care and social care facilities, courts, university etc. Although before 1996, the unemployment rate in Brno under 2%, the latest data show that unemployment has reached 10%. There were in total 19,892 unemployed registered at Brno Employment Office by the end of 2002 (9,840 of them were women). Women are in general affected by long-term unemployment more often than men (38% women in comparison with 32,8% men). Among the groups most at risk are women with small children and women over 50. Although the national employment policy pays attention to this group of unemployed within retraining programmes, it is not possible to solve the problem simply through active employment policy programmes but only as a part of a comprehensive approach by all actors. Employment Offices are responsible for national employment policy. There is no employment policy concept at Brno city level.

Although Czech legislation recognises the equal status of women and men, in real life the main obstacle to implementing equality is the traditional public opinion which is determined by the traditional attitude favouring different social roles for men and women. Representatives of women's NGOs claim that women in the Czech labour market suffer discrimination other than that evinced by the 25% income gap between women and men. According to experiences shared by unemployed women involved in the assistance programmes run by several Brno NGOs: women who have just finished their education have problems finding a job due to lack of work experience; young women are often asked about their partners and "family plans"; women with small children are considered to be a risky group due to their need to care for their children; and even though elderly women have work experience and adult children it is not easy for them to find a job because employers may consider them less attractive than young women. Women are discriminated against because of persistent stereotyped role expectations which associate women with the family and the role of mother.

Equal opportunity issues are a big challenge not only for public administration bodies but for the whole of society. There is an equal opportunity strategy at ministry departmental level but its implementation at regional and local level is still insufficient.

## **Labour Market and Social Policy**

*Dr. Szilvia Szabó*

Child care benefits in Hungary, when compared to benefits offered in other countries, were quite generous and between 8 percent and 10 percent of the female population which reached employment age annually were eligible for child-care benefits instead. This system worked smoothly until the late 1980s.

Many of the rules related to the support of families were enforced during the state-socialism before 1990 and existed till 1995 when a major change happened.

The inherited generous childcare and maternity system were dismantled and transformed into a system based on need. The modification provoked enormous social debates. It has to be noted that the various forms of assistance for child care at home, which were gradually expanded from the 1960s onwards, were the basic pillars of the Hungarian social system for more than thirty years alongside guaranteeing full employment. When the transformation of the system started and the state began to withdraw from a range of maternity benefits and services, it caused a shock.

When the paid child-care period was over, women usually found jobs again. But with the increase in unemployment, some jobs ideal for mothers were eliminated once they were ready to go back to the job market, or they found themselves dismissed after starting a particular job.

The job market for women with young children is quite meagre, and the fact that more and more women wanted to make use of child-care benefits shows that it functioned as a method of reducing unemployment.

The level of women's general educational background reaches, and in young age groups, even exceeds that of men's. This suggests that the next female generation is rather career-oriented, postpones childbirth to a later age, and wants to have only one or two children. The marriage rate is declining and different forms of co-habitations emerge.

The government elected in 1998 restored most of the elements of the childcare benefit system that existed till 1995.

The different forms of assistance for child care did not make a comprehensive social policy reform, as they did not go alongside the needed reform of the labour market policy and a change in the patriarchal attitude towards women.

A major reform of the national pension scheme was undertaken in January 1998, introducing a mixed pension scheme. New legislation also established an equal retirement age for men and women.

The National Employment Action Programme in 2000 addresses the increased promotion of part-time employment. Recent legislation has reflected a need for stimulating atypical forms of employment (teleworking, part-time work, flexible working hours). It is essential to improve the harmonisation of family and workplace obligations.

## **b) The Public and Participation**

### **The politics of women's participation. A plea for complexity in addressing dilemmas of EU gender equality policies (not only) in EU enlargement**

*Dr. Dagmar Lorenz-Meyer*

This presentation explores status and meanings of equal participation of men and women and gender equality in EU, Polish and Czech state documents on gender and enlargement related policies. The guiding argument is that we need to understand how these political concepts work to construct meaning and legitimise policies in specific contexts in order to make them work for us.

In the first part I trace how equal participation as a key element of gender equality is defined in current Community initiatives and Council Recommendations (the EU's soft law) that are meant to apply in accession. I will show that gender equality is rarely positively defined but that formulations of equal participation go beyond the principle of non-discrimination and indicate that gender equality encompasses both cultural-valuational and substantive material equality. While equal participation denotes structural transformation its formulations have also serious shortcomings: they fall short of justifying gender parity; underplay the interrelationship of different forms of social, political and economic participation; and fail to conceptualise the interaction of gender with other axes of inequality and integrate those into current 'gender indicators'.

Taking the example of the Commission's annual Regular Report of Progress Towards Accession for Poland and the Czech Republic in which progress in fulfilling the Copenhagen criteria is monitored I will show that against its own claims that equal participation of women and men in all spheres is the touchstone of democracy and that gender equality is an integral part in enlargement, the Commission did not implement gender mainstreaming in screening and accession negotiations and programmes. Rather gender equality is largely reduced to the transposition and enforcement of the Council's equal treatment directives in the sphere of employment and there is a lack of clear indicators and differential assessment even in this field.

Against this background the third part deals with progress reports of Poland and the Czech Republic, as well as with media coverage and parliamentary debates on gender equality issues. I will show that the two countries accepted the parameters of required change but that the transposition of equal treatment legislation and the institutionalisation of enforcement mechanisms remains contentious against prevalent assumptions of essentialist gender differences and discredited ideas of equality associated with state communism. In this context even progressive governmental actors have interpreted gender equality in a minimalist sense as eliminating discrimination, and legitimised EU gender policies as standards that were internationally recognised and 'proven'.

In the final part I will raise the question if and how in this societal context concepts of gender equality that denote substantive material equality can and should be pursued, a theme that I would like to discuss with the workshop participants.

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## **c) Women in Rural Areas and Ecology**

### **Women in Rural Areas and Ecology**

*Marese Hoffmann*

The analysis of women in rural areas and ecology, focussed on farmers, is justified theoretically through the concept of sustainable, gender-sensitive rural development in the sense of a transformation of society's relationship to nature. This reference framework goes beyond ecology and integrates cultural, socio-political, economic and technological factors. Integration of the gender perspective means initially the consideration of gender differences existing in reality, furthermore an extended understanding of economics to encompass "informal economics" and a consideration of the interactive effects of environmental changes and gender relations. The current situation of woman farmers in Europe is determined by two contrasting agricultural survival strategies: on the one hand, small, rural subsistence farms; and on the other hand, large-scale agrarian production plants oriented towards world markets. A feminisation of agriculture would appear to be open to criticism as regards small and "sideline" farms, where women's labour is often regarded as an unlimited natural resource to be exploited and where furthermore the inequitable segregation of the labour market is becoming more rigid. Just as much of a problem arises from an agrarian change which requires woman farmers to unilaterally introduce an ecological, regional form of agriculture without the support of a turnaround in consumption throughout society. The reassessment and restructuring of agricultural and non-agricultural work in rural regions should be central to debate on the future, and with the aim of appreciating natural spatial and social interdependencies and producing equality of opportunities.

### **Will EU-membership offer an opportunity for Polish women in rural areas?**

*Prof. Dr. Daniela Ostrowska, Jadwiga Ziolkowska, Prof. Dr.-Ing. Joachim Leuschner*

As members of the Polish-German Society for Ecology in Farming, Technology and Culture, the question of how agriculture should be structured sustainably so as to improve life in the countryside, particularly for women and young people, has occupied us for 10 years. Good results emerging from Polish-German co-operation in ecological projects has allowed us to hope that accession to the EU will speed and improve the country's path towards becoming more ecological.

There are, however, good grounds for fearing the danger that serious flaws in EU agriculture will be transferred to Poland. The current orientation pays too little attention to the ecological and social problems of rural areas and in particular to the situation of women. Many of them fear that their social situation will deteriorate if in accordance with EU-resolutions the Polish farmers only receive 25% of the subsidies their colleagues in the older EU-member states get. They believe that the EU requirements for so-called modernisation of agriculture will

force small and medium-size farms out of business. Experts have calculated, that this would result in the numbers of those in the farming and associated economic sectors who are unemployed increasing by ca. 3 million people in Poland.

Even today the unemployment rate amongst Polish women in rural areas is disproportionately high and their chances of finding a job are lower than in other branches. Inadequate health care provision together with a lack of nursery care robs most rural women of the chance of furthering their education.

The problems will only be solved when the EU increases its support for improvements to rural infrastructure through social and ecological programmes. The scientific-technical and intellectual requirements are already available. They include ecological innovations which have already proved themselves in practice and to which the PNT-ATK amongst others has made important contributions. Regional processing of rural economic products in particular, must be organised so that the added value remains in the region and can be used to improve the infrastructure, to create jobs and to support start-ups and women.

The women in the countryside have an enormous potential to play a part in making the economy more ecological. It is of great importance, however, that they help motivate young people towards ecological renewal of rural areas. Only women in equal co-operation with their male partners will be able to solve this complex task successfully.

## **d) Human Rights**

### **Some Aspects of Trafficking in Women in Roma Community**

*Petra Kutáľková*

Trafficking in persons defined by UN is a major infringement on human rights. In the Czech Republic, public benefit company La Strada deals with this problem; it has been operating in this field systematically since 1995. In the last two years the number of Romany clients has been increasing among the clients of La Strada. Romany community numbers about 250 000 people in the Czech Republic. Most of these people are forced to live in localities that are close to ethnic ghettos in their nature. Those are the areas where risk factors cumulate, which significantly raises the endangerment of Romany women from the aspect of trafficking. In the context of the social -economic situation these factors include, above all, unemployment, difficulty in employability, poverty, low education, the acceptability of illicit job market or alcohol and drug dependence. These risk factors are joined by others that are linked to the ethno-cultural background of Romany community – different attitudes toward women rights, orientation on the here and now, the increasing number of emigrating Romanies and last, but not least, the heathenishness of Romany women for potential buyers. A consequence of life in these areas is social exclusion. This is not only one of the main reasons for the existence of trafficking in persons among Romanies, but also a significant obstacle in informing Romany women of their rights and possibilities of help.

### **Roma Women in Hungary/The Problem of Prostitution**

*Rimma Dalos*

*Roma Women*

The Roma minority makes up about 6% of Hungary's rural population. The lecture concentrates mainly on the topics education, motherhood and the labour market with regard to Roma women.

Roma children face considerable discrimination from the time they start school. A large percentage of the children are designated as being "insufficiently capable of understanding" and sent to special needs schools, originally established for the mentally handicapped.

Although Roma girls are often better able to learn and thus to meet the demands schools place on them, the boys receive much more support. This is primarily due to the fact that the women have their children at the age of 14 -20 years and are therefore unable to attend school at that age.

Moreover, many Roma men became unemployed during the nineties, so that child allowance and family benefit payments are often the family's only source of income. It can be said that almost 70% of Roma live in economically underdeveloped and structurally weak regions. Because of low educational attainment (many cannot read or write) and early motherhood most women stand virtually no chance of finding a job.

Since the change in the political system, each government has attempted to find a solution for the Roma's problems, yet none have initiated a programme with real content capable of solving the problem

### *Prostitution in Hungary*

Prostitution has existed in Hungary for a long time, whether secretly or openly, in private apartments, in hotel rooms and more than 80% of it on the streets. The change in the political system at the beginning of the nineties brought with it not only more freedom, but also more prostitution; the borders were open and many women from Romania, Ukraine and the Baltic States chose to go to Hungary. The chief motivating factor for the high levels of prostitution (currently estimated at about 8000-10,000 women and men) is extremely high unemployment.

It would of course be possible for the legislature to take measures to help prostitutes, but over recent years much of the work towards alleviating the problem has been performed by NGOs such as the Foundation for Sexual Education, established in 1991.

## **Shaping the EU Enlargement: Two Examples from Border Regions**

### **Shaping EU enlargement: The East-West European Women's Network – an example of cross-border women's initiatives on the Oder/Neisse line**

*Joanna Barelkowska*

For over ten years the East-West European Women's Network (OWEN) has, amongst other activities, been promoting exchange between women from the border regions of Poland and Germany (in particular from Brandenburg). These exchanges are generally aimed at intensifying German-Polish co-operation, which is of increasing importance given Poland's approaching accession to the EU. In particular, the exchanges are intended to strengthen the German and Polish participants active involvement in civil society.

Our seminars, workshops and conferences are aimed primarily at women on either side of the border who are actively engaged in working towards equality of women and men, whether in non-governmental organisations or in local administration. On the German side, our most important partners are the local commissioners for equality, who for their part maintain good contacts to various NGOs. Over the past ten years numerous women's initiatives and organisations have sprung up in Poland, and given the absence of institutional gender-political structures comparable to those in Germany, these have been our most important associates in working towards gender equality. Two years ago we established our first contact to universities with the informal group Gender which is active at the Collegium Polonicum in Słubice both as regards gender equality and in promoting gender-political, cross-border dialogue. At our events we bring together representatives from NGOs, local

administration, from politics and academic life and by doing this hope to encourage mutual recognition as well as the development of common political goals regarding equality.

In the seminars, workshops and conferences we offer room both for reflection and discussion of current topics and of German and Polish history and culture. Taking our lead from Johan Galtung we examine the personal, structural and cultural levels of different topics, such as women and equality politics, biography and history, dealing with conflict. Starting out from the personal motivation and situation of German and Polish women we examine differences between the structures in Germany (Brandenburg) and Poland and discuss the pros and cons of the institutionalisation of equality politics such as that which we are generally faced with in Germany. Cultural differences play a major role on the German Polish border, which was established arbitrarily 60 years ago and has therefore not developed over time to form a culturally more uniform area. For that reason we have chosen themes such as the differences in the image women have in German and Polish society and attempt to discover the common ground which can serve as a basis for communication. Starting out from the biographical experiences of the women we also consider German/Polish history. By telling one another about their own often very painful experiences (such as deportation or compulsory labour) but also of experiences of human strength and goodness, the women become quite a bit closer and can break one or two German/Polish taboos.

It should not be thought that such exchanges take place free from any problems. The interest is much greater on the Polish side than it is on the German. Curiosity about their Western neighbours is widespread in Poland, as is the hope that the contact could perhaps be of ideal or material value. We often have a lot of convincing to do amongst the Germans, as contact to their Eastern neighbours is sometimes considered as being an additional and not always particularly welcome burden. After the events, however, we frequently hear from both German and Polish participants that they found the exchange personally and professionally worthwhile and that they would like to work more closely with their neighbours.

## **Presentation of the EUREGIO EGRENSIS**

*Dr. Birgit Seelbinder*

According to its statutes, the EUREGIO EGRENSIS has the purpose of contributing to understanding and tolerance as well as comprehensive, peaceful and partnerlike co-operation transcending the borders between the Free State of Bavaria, the Free States of Saxony and Thuringia as well as the Czech Republic.

The EUREGIO EGRENSIS (EE) co-ordinates and promotes cross-border co-operation and development in a spirit of friendship between good neighbours.

In 1991/1992 the three EE working groups were founded:

- the EE working group Bohemia,
- the EE working group Bavaria, and
- the EE working group Vogtland/Westerzgebirge,

On February 3rd, 1993 in Eger, the three working groups amalgamated on the basis of a common agreement. Today the EUREGIO EGRENSIS region covers altogether an area of approx. 17,000 km<sup>2</sup> with about 2 million inhabitants.

Today, after forty years of silence, the EUREGIO EGRENSIS regards itself both as forerunner and companion to the region on its way towards the common European house and thus into the European Union.



## Visions of Europe

### Women's memory – a necessity for the future

*Dr. Marina Grasse*

The European and global changes which set in during the nineties brought with them profound changes in the relations between state, market and civil society. Former social and cultural gender constructions of biographies and identities are changing rapidly.

The new social framework-conditions for self understanding and for active involvement as protagonists and citizens, as well as European integration both pose a particular challenge for women in and from Central and Eastern European countries, and call upon them to examine historical and biographical courses of events from their own perspective.

In the mid-nineties, the Centre for Gender Studies in Prague developed the idea of questioning women from different generations who had experienced life under the socialist regime about their own biographical experiences. From this idea the international education and research project "Women's memory – in search of the life and identity of women in socialism" was born in 1998. To date, women's organisations have participated from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Croatia, Yugoslavia, Ukraine and Germany.

OWEN is the (east) German partner in this scheme.

Further regional expansion into Russia and other Central and East European countries is planned.

"Women's memory" aims to stimulate constructive discussion of biographies and lifetime-planning within the context of the historical developments, patriarchal cultures and power structures in the Europe of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The project serves discovery and rediscovery of actively structured life, of values, experiences and knowledge, that generations of women from different social systems and cultures are supplying as a potential for the restructuring of Europe. "Women's memory" allows us to become aware of the diversity of European roots. The project encourages and supports women to use their position as protagonists of social changes so as to achieve a future where power conditions are gender-equitable.

### Identities and Differences: Framing the Issues

*Prof. Dr. Linda Fisher*

If the question of what Europe is, or what constitutes a European identity, has long been the subject of discussion and debate, it is becoming even more complicated with the pending EU Enlargement and the introduction into the EU of countries which, for various reasons, have had a complicated relation to the rest of Europe. Not only are the candidate countries specific, individual and in their own ways unique additions to the European mosaic, representing yet new challenges for the notion of a European confederation; but the additional factors of a very particular history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the accompanying differences this represents, introduce greater challenges still. Seen in broad terms as an East-West issue, with different respective histories, experiences, and sensibilities, it raises questions for both sides of the "divided" about identity and affiliation. If such issues of identity are represented in Western Europe by questions about whether one is first European, or first German, French, Spanish, etc., then for the accession countries there is the additional layer of whether one is "Western" or "Eastern". And to the extent that Europe was conventionally identified as the West, or that being European meant being Western, how does the introduction of "Eastern" countries affect this identity? Is "Europe" no longer seen as strictly "Western"? Do "Eastern" countries become not only westernised but "Western" by

accession? Does Europe become more pluralistic, encompassing East and West in a larger mosaic? Or do such distinctions of East and West disappear, or become mere geographical distinctions? And most fundamentally, how will the dialectic of identities and differences be realised in this new context?

Discussion points:

From outside Europe, to the “Other Europe”, to the “New Europe”: Transition countries approach a European identity.

- Is it the case that “Old Europe” will adopt and integrate facets of “New Europe”, as new ingredients that enhance the mosaic and transform its identity? Or will “New Europe” have to adapt to an acquire the more dominant identity of “Old Europe”?
- The ambiguity of New Europe identity: Is it the case that the accession countries are considered to be European, or not really European? Are they sometimes thought to be at one and the same time European *and* non-European? Or perhaps *potentially* European, to become full Europeans upon accession? Or even subsequently, as the Europeanising process unfolds in the period following accession?
- Is “European identity” a prerequisite for being part of the European Union, either in terms of already present, or acquired later? Is the fact that the accession countries are poised to join the EU a sign of their (at least) latent or potential European identity? Or in the future will being part of the EU not necessarily indicate anything about identity, but rather simply a particular political and economic alliance? And what would be the implications of that situation for the concept of European identity? Does becoming Europeanised mean simply the attainment of certain markers – economic, human rights, etc. – or does it entail some kind of identity concept?

Have we lost a battle or have we lost a war? Polish feminists and the European integration

*Agnieszka Grzybek*

Have we lost a battle or have we lost a war? This question should be raised at the first place when we look into the process of the Polish accession to the European Union. Since the middle of nineties Polish women’s organizations have undertaken many activities aimed at informing public about equal opportunities of women and men, gender policy of European Union. The argument of equal treatment as a crucial principle of European policy towards women was used to convince the Polish decision-makers to include women’s rights in the public debate and to build institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women. Now, after a few years of pursuing the Polish government and media to talk about and to counteract discrimination against women, even the right wing press admits that women are discriminated in Poland. However, it is limited only to the labour market. The Polish Parliament included all the EU equal treatment directives into the Polish labour code. Now it seems that even the provisions against sexual harassment will be incorporated into the Polish law. But there are still areas which are not taken into consideration such as violence against women, reproductive and sexual rights. Since the beginning of 2002 we have been witnessing the battle for women’s right to abortion. Although the winning coalition SLD-UP (Left Democratic Alliance-Union of Labour) promised to their woman voters to change the restrictive antiabortion law, just after winning the elections in September 2001 they started to withdraw from their election promises. It was the reason why feminist activists wrote a letter to the European Parliament indicating the existence of a peculiar agreement reached by the Church and the Polish government at the expense of Polish women. Does such an agreement exist? Have we managed to oppose it? Where are women’s human rights in the Polish debate concerning EU integration?