

Communique

EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LOBBY CENTRAL, EASTERN AND SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE TASK FORCE

19-21 JANUARY 2015

The European Women's Lobby (EWL) is the largest umbrella organisation of women's associations in the European Union (EU), working to promote women's rights and equality between women and men. EWL membership extends to organisations in all 28 EU member states and the three candidate countries, as well as to 20 European-wide bodies, representing a total of more than 2500 organisations.

On the 10th Anniversary of the EU-membership of the countries in East Central European, Baltic and Balkan States, there are serious concerns about the extent to which EU membership has brought benefits in terms of gender equality. Challenges in terms of pay gap, women's political participation, violence against women and political space for women's organisations persist and in some cases are growing. Therefore EWL membership has identified a need to come together to discuss common strategies to address institutional, human rights and economic aspects of gender inequality in East Central European, Baltic and Balkan States. The purpose of the EWL **Task Force** on East Central European, Baltic and Balkan States is to:

- ✓ Share information and learning amongst Members of the EWL in East Central European, Baltic and Balkan States to identify any gaps and synergies.
- ✓ Strengthen joint strategies for advancing gender equality and challenging resistance.
- ✓ Design and implement common projects

The Task Force had its first meeting on 19-21 January 2015, to share information, develop a common analysis of the threats and opportunities for women's rights in the region, as well as to develop common intervention strategies to address the backlash and bolster support for women's rights.

As a Task Force we shared information on the following **key questions**:

- Can you describe the general situation for women in your country and any trends around women in power, women in the economy, VAW?
- What are the key external political threats including - but not limited to - women's rights?
- What is the state of institutional mechanisms for gender equality (ministries, gender equality department)?
- Do you have the "gender ideology" debate, and how is that impacting on women's rights. In your assessment who or what is driving that debate?
- What are the major challenges faced by women's organisations (internal)

Based on this information sharing, we then did some initial analysis of trends, impact and responses. We deepened the analysis of the Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats: looking at the impact on women's rights, impact on the women's movement and possible future responses. We examined how these challenges and threats have the potential to impact on the EU as a whole through undermining core EU values of equality between women and men, fighting discrimination, eliminating poverty and securing democratic, inclusive societies. Finally we also started to look at the impact on pre accession countries and processes.

Summary of the threats identified:

1. Traditional fundamentalist conservative forces:
2. Austerity and women in the economy
3. Lack of understanding of women's rights and gender equality
4. Threats to democracy:
 - ✓ Lack of understanding of role of CSOs in upholding democratic accountability and constant undermining and rejecting the watchdog role and the purpose of civil society.
 - ✓ Lack of alternative sources of funding for CSOs guaranteeing independent and autonomous position in society.
5. Funding and corruption:
6. Cooption of right to freedom of speech and human rights as a right to reinforce sexist stereotypes in society.

Opportunities

- ✓ Good, existing legal framework for equal treatment, antidiscrimination and gender equality in most countries on national/EU and international level (Cedaw, Istanbul Convention, EU framework, + national Laws and strategies).
- ✓ The new EU Gender Equality Strategy is a very good opportunity. This EU strategy should encompass both the EU and the national level, making it possible to avoid political shifts on national level threaten gender equality achievements (backlash).
- ✓ The new position of Commissioner of Justice, Consumers' Rights and Gender Equality, that of Ms Jourova, is very welcome by EWL and its membership.
- ✓ Eige's existence is a positive achievement for the women's movement in Europe. We appreciate their good cooperation with women ngo-s. We would like to see its mandate strengthened, including by taking over the work done by the FRA on violence against women and to expand and develop further work on the issue to feed into policy making.
- ✓ Professional capacity exists now in Europe of feminist academics, gender experts and women ngo-s and activists to carry out independent monitoring of the implementation of already existing gender equality legislation and policies.
- ✓ There is a strong existing women's movement in this region, members of the EWL. On this basis there is scope for building a common vision and program and unite forces to strengthen the women's movement on specific issues.
- ✓ A new generation of young activists appeared in the women's movement, highly educated, also in gender studies, representing fresh thoughts and skills. It is possible to pass the torch on from one generation to the other.
- ✓ Although with limitations due to the specific financial and HR set-up of women NGOs in the region, there are funds available (ESF, Norway Grants, Norwegian Civic Fund, direct funding from EU, etc.) It would be great to achieve an amendment in the partnership agreements to have separate funding allocated to gender equality.

Finally, building on the emerging analysis we did some dreaming about a future vision for the women's movement in the region. We then defined some key programmatic strategies that could be used to address the challenges identified and achieve our vision. The Task Force will continue to work throughout 2015 to develop the analysis and the response from the Women's Movement.