

Summary Report

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

19-21 JANUARY 2015

INTRODUCTION

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.

This is a very interesting time for the women's movement globally and in Europe. Key opportunities to tackle gender discrimination exist through connecting innovative new feminisms and online activism to more traditional forms of advocacy for change. Frustration within civil society at the rise of the far right in Europe requires us to reinforce alliances for progressive change across European social movements and networks. The European Women's Lobby is the European women's voice for a Feminist Europe.

Members in the Region: EWL has member organisations in 11 EU Member States in Baltic, Balkan and Central and Eastern European Region. There are also EWL Members in Serbia, Macedonia and Turkey. We also have partnerships with women's organisations across the Balkans and Eastern neighbourhood (Kosovo, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Moldova, Ukraine). EWL has network members that are also engaged in the region; especially Federation of Roma and Traveller Women, European Network of Migrant Women, Soroptimists, ETUC etc.)

Our national members are coalitions including active women's organisations working locally and nationally on a variety of priority issues such as economic independence, VAW, Trafficking, prostitution and sexual exploitation, Women in leadership etc. The national coordinations are playing a leading role presenting a common voice at national level on gender equality and women's rights. As a result of their work and activities new legislation has been activated on VAW, anti-discrimination.

These members also play an essential role in ensuring the translation of EU values and policies for gender equality into the national level. They make a vital connection to EU level work and campaigns. In addition they connect this national and EU work to the international level through holding governments accountable to Beijing PFA, CEDAW...

Why this Task Force and why now?

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



PARTICIPANTS:

- ✓ Laura Albu (Romanian Women's Lobby)
- ✓ Daniela Antonovska (EWL Coordination in FYROM)
- ✓ Iliana Balabanova-Stoycheva (Bulgarian Women's Lobby)
- ✓ Jeanne Gamonet (Federation of Romani and Traveller Women)
- ✓ Borbala Juhasz (Hungarian Women's Lobby)
- ✓ Nela Pamukovic (Women's Network of Croatia)
- ✓ Metka Roksandic (Women's Lobby of Slovenia)
- ✓ Jana Smiggels Kavkova (Czech Women's Lobby)
- ✓ Joanna Maycock, Secretary-General EWL
- ✓ Valentina Brogna, EWL

APOLOGIES:

- ✓ Monica Cristea (European Network of Migrant Women)
- ✓ Eha Reitelmann (Estonian Women's Associations Roundtable)

ANALYSIS BY THE TASK FORCE

For almost all countries in the region, 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)

We had input from Latvia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania , Serbia, Macedonia, and from the Federation of Roma and Traveller Women. (not Lithuania, Estonia, Poland and ENoMW)

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.

Analysis of Threats to Women's Rights in the Region

1. Traditional fundamentalist conservative forces:

Religion, nationalism, racism, anti-Roma, anti LGBT and patriarchy are becoming stronger, more organized and receiving strategic funding from evangelical US, Catholic, Russian. They are entering key positions in UN, CSOs, Governments, media. Conservative ideas are shared by the state in some cases (eg. Hungary, Slovakia).

States are also funding and supporting rising church influence and role. In some countries Churches are receiving EU structural funds eg Poland, Hungary;

Impact on women's rights and women's movement :

- Promotion of traditional roles for women as care takers, mothers, subordinate
- Poverty and inequality

- Emigration: women especially working in low paid precarious care work in Western Europe (link to austerity)
- Attacks on SRHR – anti-abortion campaigns, churches presence in hospitals, promotion of traditional role of mother with multiple children, added to racist campaign against Roma women having children –hate speech.
- Direct impact on attitudes to minorities, women, LGBT rights etc. – physical attacks, hate speeches, and even denial of some rights.
- Drawing women back to personal space and away from political and public life: not enjoying full citizenship
- Even if working and first breadwinner, women are still expected to play the role of unpaid care work (elder care, child care, domestic drudgery...)
- Increased political influence of church in society – using religion as a tool for transmission, manipulation and influencing population on elections, traditional family roles, right to abortion, etc.

2. Austerity and women in the economy

Impact on women's rights :

- Austerity has undermined women's economic independence across the region: higher unemployment, lower wages, esp public sector jobs, more precarious, low paid part time work, cutting or eliminating welfare, increase poverty and decreased access of public services (health, child care, education, specific support services for women)
- Women are finding it harder to enter and re-enter the labour market resulting in a decline of women's labour market participation
- Emigration of women to work in other parts of Europe in low paid care jobs; leaving their own families to be cared by friends, parents etc. These women are often left unprotected in the grey economy
- Reducing benefits such decreasing and elimination of unemployment benefits (eg Hungary); reduced maternity leave contributions, out-sourcing through "fake" self employment companies (jobs usually occupied by women –who are losing some of their benefits.)
- Pensions are being reduced or stagnated, and there is a specific problem in the gap in pensions between women and men. With an aging population this is leading to the impoverishment of elderly women. Older women are often depended upon for supporting care work for other relatives to enable them to go to work.
- Women bear the brunt of responsibility for child care in single parent headed households. Reduction of welfare is impacting on the poverty of these households.

3. Lack of understanding of women's rights and gender equality

There is a complacency that gender equality has already been achieved because everything is alright! The 2 facts misused as arguments: higher rate of education of women and labour market participation is relatively high as per EU average.

Also many politicians and citizens believe that equality between women and men was achieved a long time ago during socialist regimes. Many believe that the idea of gender equality and women's rights is an imported or imposed agenda from the West/EU or from East /Soviet Union.

Because of this, many political leaders and public servants are even afraid to speak or be champions of women's rights in case they are perceived to be espousing retrograde soviet values or imported western ideas. This is linked to critique of soviet policies to promote women's political and professional participation. Even the idea of "equality" is challenged as a value that is represented by the dark soviet/communism/socialist times and is openly attacked as undermining the family.

Impact on women's rights :

- Combined with the return to traditional values outlined above is having a very poisonous impact on women's rights and gender equality in the region though there are significant differences between countries.
- Commitments to EU values of equality between women and men is accepted superficially. However, this is not implemented through policies, law and funding to support women's rights.
- In certain countries, the very concept of equality between women and men is increasingly openly rejected by institutions and politicians (Slovakia, Latvia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Croatia) that is particularly where the church has a strong influence.

4. Threats to democracy:

4.1 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.

Governments and institutions perceive constructive criticism, challenges and even requests for transparency as direct attacks. In some cases governments and institutions are responding by attacking the NGOs or even the individuals: through increased controls, slander, withdrawal of political space and funding etc. Some governments have initiated processes for NGOs to "re-register", offering opportunities for Government to introduce great control over the sector. Often NGOs are reduced to only service provision or even replacing the role of the state eg. Care of elderly etc. In other cases there are constant attempts by the state to control NGO role in service provision, even if the funds are private.

Impact: CSO's and particularly women's organisations are limited in playing their essential role as watchdogs and guardians of participatory democracy. Only state friendly NGOs "the good guys" are able to access political space and funding. There is increased competition and reduced collaboration between NGOs. Many real NGOs are closing

4.2 Lack of alternative sources of funding for CSOs guaranteeing independent and autonomous position in society.

Before accession in EU, all countries from region benefit from external grants focused on democracy, watch dog and advocacy on main human rights and governance issues, and also grants dedicated to

women movement and women NGOs. Unfortunately, the process of integration didn't solve many of the threats on democracy and now they are increasing because of poor control over the way governments are implementing EU regulations. Under these circumstances, NGOs need new tools to address these problems.

5. Funding and corruption:

Corruption of state and increased power of political parties in controlling resources and civic space especially strong in Hungary but tendencies in other places eg Romania, Slovakia, Bulgaria (eg. Even if many politicians are now in jail –in Croatia, Romania, the system continues to be highly corrupted).

State resources including EU funding and Norwegian funds are not in some cases reaching the intended results and recipients because national institutions are adding so many layers of bureaucracy that it is unclear how projects are designed, implemented and what the impact is.

There are serious concerns about the lack of transparency and even corruption in the distribution of Structural funds: resources distributed to fake NGOs, political friends and churches.

Lack of understanding or even commitment to gender equality and human rights means that programmes designed at national level are failing to find their way into national strategies, EU Programmes, etc. eg. No gender perspective in national policies, programmes, etc (cf. EWL barometer on national action plans on VAW and rape)

Impact:

- Even when there are policies eg national action plans on gender equality or plans for ending VAW, there is no funding for implementation of these action plans.
- Lack of resources for work on women's rights at all levels: service provision, support infrastructure, advocacy, education.
- Lack of resources for women's rights institutions and gender equality training for institutions (judges, police, parliaments etc.)
- It is becoming increasingly difficult for women's organisations to access any of these funds

6. Cooption of right to freedom of speech and human rights as a right to reinforce sexist stereotypes in society. The right to freedom of speech is used as an excuse to exploit and belittle women. It is becoming increasingly "acceptable" for public figures, media and political leaders to make misogynist and sexist remarks about the role and status of women in general and about specific women in particular.

Impact on women's rights :

- Strong women political figures are withdrawing or removed from political life or influence or are not going near it.
- In some countries women's political careers are dependent on male patronage.

- In countries that do not have quotas for political participation of women, their participation is stagnating (eg. Romania, Hungary and many more) though in some places which have quotas for political participation (Slovenia, Czech Republic) there is a real improvement.
- Pornographication of society which is reinforcing patriarchy and misogyny (eg. Rape culture, child abuse, prostitution, video porn)

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). It is an opportunity now to introduce specific EU legislation to diversify institutional gender equality mechanisms at national level.

The new EU Gender Equality Strategy is a very good opportunity, and the consultation in April presents an opportunity to have an input into the preparation and designing of the new strategy by EWL, by its member organisations and by this Task Force. 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 Jurova, is very welcome by EWL and its membership. She should take a strong leadership role on it.

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 strenghtened, 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 an 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 storch on from one generation to the other.

Although with limitations due to the specific financial and HR set-up of women ngo-s 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. Public precurement for Sructural Fund money could be required to have funds allocated to reach the gender equality objective. Gender budgeting should be integrated into the mechanisms of money distribution.

It is an opportunity that EWL and its national coordinations already exist representing considerable expertise.

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.

Overview of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Young feminists - New forms of activism and mobilization, eg: through social media - Accumulated knowledge of mature NGOs - Accumulated knowledge on gender issues at academic level, developed feminist theory - Existing coalitions and networks, such as EWL, Women's Rights NGOs supporting the same causes in different countries, LGBT NGOs, Human Rights NGOs etc. – humanists, academics, secularist movement - Most countries have women's NGOs members within EWL - EWL's public recognition and influence - Experienced in facing challenges and winning - Women's Rights CSOs included in consultations - Donors environment (from Norway especially) - ECEBBS Task force itself - Feminist Summer School - Intersectionality - Leadership skills (strategic communication, fundraising) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of funding and of human resources, no real financial and organizational (staff) capacity at national level - Co-financing - Intergenerational: older activists holding space - Lack of clear criteria of project evaluation of Norway Grants + EEA at National Level - Lack of cooperation with potential allies - No collective political strategizing - Lack of women leaders in CSOs (beyond women's movement) - Fake NGOs (based on church, state or private interests) - Project coalitions-partnerships vs political coalitions - Donors' influence - Project-related activities are overwhelming and prevent from thinking wide - Lack of knowledge of the concrete ways EWL can support individual country members

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good legislation regarding reproductive rights (heritage from the past regimes) - International Cooperation - Cooperation with gender equality institutions - Gender Equality Index - Lobby on concrete topics at national and regional level, based on national data - Political shifts make a difference - EU accession process & negotiations, EU policies - Gender equality mechanisms, new departments/agencies for equal opportunities - Local and international legal framework - Connect existing coalitions & networks, experts, academics, feminist lawyers etc. - Organizing women's movement on specific issues at National / EU level - Lobby at EU Council and Members States level - EU Commissioner for Gender Equality - EU Gender Equality Strategy - More strategic use of EU presidencies - Accessing EU funds for common projects among these countries - Norway grants - Sharing of good practices/models among these countries - Generational shift => changing attitudes? - Beijing +20 & CSW process (Post 2015) - International Institutions, CEDAW, UNWomen... - Istanbul Convention processes - FRA Survey follow-up - High level of education of girls and women - Women in politics: quotas in some countries increase women's participation - Building common programme of work to build women's movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changing national laws on NGOs - Mafia states, extended model of corruption and access to resources controlled by the state - Fascist forces raising everywhere - Enormous capacity and good organization of churches - Patriarchy - Fear to oppose is interiorized - Fundamentalism and conservatism - Strong traditional roles (family...) - Neoliberal politics - Nationalism & EU apathy - Politics overruling universally achieved standards (women's rights, equality, social rights) - Withdrawal of foreign funds - Not enough EU funds - Shrinking CSO space - Total control of the State over policies and ratification of important laws - Misunderstanding of freedom of speech, misuse of free speech to exploit women, porn culture

Vision for the Women's Movement in 2025

- 1. The women's movement has supported successful shifts in policy, law and practice in line with existing commitments at International and EU level (Beijing, EU Gender Equality Strategy, CEDAW, Istanbul...)**
 - a. Women are positively valued by society. The women's movement supports them to continue to demand to have their voices heard, to have resources, success and access to work, education, plus freedom from violence.
 - b. Women' economic independence.....
 - c. All states have effective institutions to support the effective achievement of equality between women and men (ministries, equality bodies etc.).
 - d. Istanbul convention has been ratified and implemented : Violence against women is properly prosecuted and punished
 - e. Quotas for women in politics and there are more competent feminist women politicians
 - f. Women are playing a powerful role in the governance of corporations
 - g. The laws are really and effectively implemented, and resourced,
 - h. Compulsory sex, gender and equality education in schools and all state institutions – inductions trainings.

- 2. There is a strong women's movement with visible and effective leadership that is able to mobilise citizens, youth, politicians and the media in support of gender equality and women's rights**
 - a. Women's organisations are respected independent critical partners of the state
 - b. The women's movement is working in effective and strategic alliance with other social movements and actors (environmental, Human rights, civil servants, governments, academics, media, lawyers)
 - c. The women's movement in the region is connected nationally, and at EU and global level through joint programmes and campaigns. It is operating in solidarity with women's organisations in the neighborhood.
 - d. The women's movement has a clear transformative political vision that is well understood and communicated
 - e. EWL and national coordination's continue to conduct cases for liberation from harmful tradition and culture .
 - f. Stabilized and sustainable NGOs with long term programs and campaigns, funding and human resources
 - g. Strong national coordination, both at national, EU advocacy and campaigns, NGOs funds for core activities

WHAT ARE THE AREAS FOR STRATEGIC INTERVENTION THAT NEED TO BE DEVELOPED TO ACHIEVE THIS VISION?

1	Fruitful participation in development and implementation of EU Gender Equality strategy and women NGOs participating in monitoring mechanism of implementation of strategy
2	Work with media in tackle sexism and stereotypes/Build national level monitoring/work with journalists, students/editorial boards
3	Develop of strategic political work on funding for women NGOs /include women's bank and funds/include supporting members fundraising
4	Public campaigns at national and EU level focused on women's rights and visibility of EWL and national platforms
5	We will act the abolition of prostitution building on Brussel Call, tackling those with euro and power, work with police
6	Strategic leadership and organisation, development of an feminist approach, campaigning, media, speaking, tackling right wing opposition
7	Study opposition, especially Opus Dei and copy their tactics, undermine their arguments (investigative journalism)
8	Strengthening 50/50 campaign /feminist politicians in power, training for politicians, develop common training at local, national, mentoring + organising study

FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

The followings are follow-up actions for the next months, agreed upon by its members at the end of the 3-day discussions:

	Action	Who	By when
1	<p>FACT SHEET: Mapping the most important changes/challenges of each country (2 pages each) and elaborate the analysis => drawing a comparative table/grid on women's rights in those countries (build on the Gender Equality Index)</p> <p>+ Developing a PPT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each member of the Task Force to draft the 2-page analysis for her country • Use existing written contributions from Slovakia, and Serbia • Ask Poland, Lithuania, Serbia as well • ENoMW and Fed. Romani Women • Who to draft the comparative analysis? • Who to prepare the PPT? 	April 2015
2	<p>DISSEMINATION OF THE FACT SHEET:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To potential and existing donors (ex: HBS, FES, OSF...) - To other CSOs - To EU institutions 	National Coordinations to do DISSEMINATION OF THE FACT SHEET AT NATIONAL LEVEL	April – June 2015
3	<p>INTEGRATION INTO THE EU STRATEGY ON GENDER EQUALITY: Influencing the outcome of EU strategic planning process on Gender Equality on these issues, through the consultation on 20-21 April 2015</p>	All participants to the Task Force form National Coordinations	20-21 April 2015
4	INTEGRATION INTO EWL STRATEGIC PLANNING	Joanna Maycock	Ongoing
5	<p>SHARING THE RESULTS OF THE MEETING WITH ALL EWL MEMBERS:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Feedback to EWL Executive Committee 2) Feedback to EWL Staff 3) Feedback to all EWL members 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Borbala Juhasz 2) Joanna Maycock 3) Valentina Brogna 	By 3 February
6	JOINT WORKSHOP WITH FES, HBS, OSF to bring together analysis and plans, and broaden our feminist outreach	Borbala Juhasz	TBC
8	DEVELOPING A MEDIA STRATEGY, ex: Press Conference with EuroNews		May 2015
9	MEETING WITH MEPs	Board Members from National Coordinations of these countries	Following the EC consultation (22 April?)
10	NEXT MEETING OF THE TASK FORCE	Members of the Task Force, Joanna Maycock Valentina to set date	End of March
11	DEVELOPING STRATEGIC INTERVENTION IDEAS	Members of the Task Force : need to distribute the work to each member	
12	DEEPENING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF PREVIOUS FUNDING FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS	Members of the Task Force, Joanna Maycock	