

Different Traditions – Similar Challenges Gender Equality Policies in an Enlarged Europe – An Introduction

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With the fourth volume in the series “Gender kompetent”, the GenderCompetenceCentre at the Humboldt University of Berlin takes on a European perspective. We believe that both the German as well as the wider international discussion around strategies towards gender equality can profit from other countries’ successes and often hard-won experience. Therefore, this volume focuses on diverse and different topics, strategies and instruments for promoting gender equality in the European Union (EU).

Any debate that actively incorporates the comparative European perspective will give new impetus to one’s own work. Here, it is particularly with a view to developments in new EU Member States that we can observe the problems, opportunities and challenges that any multi-level policy on gender equality has to face: apart from creating a legal framework and institutional structures to allow gender equality to be translated into practice, countries need to precede with or actively provide for the political will, sufficient resources and lasting support at all levels of society to not only ensure equal rights but to inch closer to real equality between men and women, in all their diversity.

The question is what policies are needed to turn the promise of equal opportunities into a social reality. It is posed in a different way in differing national contexts: what issues, what images, or stereotypes, and what topics are touched upon once the goal of gender equality reaches the realm of politics? More precisely, and increasingly obvious today: what should be addressed in gender equality policies not only to ensure equality of men and women, but also to guarantee that such policies do not create new unequal-

ities, as between rich and poor, natives and migrants, young and old, heterosexuals, differently-abled, and other “others”? To analyse this, the EU is funding a project entitled QUING (Quality in Gender + Equality Policies) that investigates whether there is a move to create discursive frames to link questions of equality with the seemingly homogeneous groups of “women” and “men” or whether there are frames to – more appropriately – address equality as a matter of potential discrimination of people in specific and diverse contexts in order to fight sexism, racism, homophobia, gerontophobia etc. (<http://www.quing.eu>, see also Verloo/Maloutas 2005). This also raises the question what characterises specific gender regimes, or what engenders governance: how does a society organise certain questions of equality; which actors, which regulating schemes and ways of allocating resources are to be identified in which field and what characterises the hegemonic constructions of femininities and masculinities? Gender regimes as specific instances of – also institutionalised – equality policies can be organised very differently but have proved to be a very productive concept in comparative European research (see Connell 1987; Pascall/Lewis 2004; Pascall/Kwak 2005; Walby 2004; Zippel 2006; Kulawik 2005; Betzelt 2007). However, the new EU Member States – the very focus of this volume – still need to be incorporated into this heuristic model.

When comparing gender equality policies in the 15 “old” Member States of the EU before 2004 and the “new” Member States – i.e., Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Malta and Cyprus as well as Bulgaria and Romania – after its expansion to the east in 2004 and 2007, a very complex picture arises. Little systematic research has been done up to now (Bustelo 2003; Behning/Sauer 2005) but the findings already conflict with clichéd constructions of “West” and “East” or “old” and “new” states, as every state exhibits very varied equality policies in its cultural, societal, legal and institutional manifestations. The comparison, however, yields insights into dynamics that may impact differently in the individual countries, but that must also be analysed as to their transnational, EU-wide significance. We can observe how a certain neo-liberal push of globalisation is affecting equality policies in all Member States in a way that could give rise to a backlash in gender politics as a whole. The withdrawal from certain fields of politics by the state is of similar importance to gender equality as the loss of certain labour markets to the EU; all Member States are affected by migration and the rediscovery of specific notions of the family and of traditional values – a double-edged development in the context of gender equality policy.

Thus, it can be said that old and new Member States exhibit similar attitudes towards gender equality as a political goal. These attitudes can be traced to

very diverse origins but are positioned within a similar frame. We are, for example, faced with a certain lack of willingness to continue or to start defining equality as a relevant field of politics: a development that must be kept in check.

Within the EU and in states that have a tradition of active equality policies, such as the Netherlands or Denmark, the strategy of Gender Mainstreaming (GM), which enjoyed great support after 1995, is now looked upon with great disillusionment or is even negatively assessed. There still is the objective of establishing gender equality systematically within the mainstream of politics and administration, in order to effect not only equality between the sexes but beyond (“gender” means contextualising gender within a multiplicity of inequalities). But it has only been implemented in part or in the realm of mere rhetoric. It is obvious now that institutional, regulatory or instrumental progress resulting from Gender Mainstreaming has all too often led to a rather negative conclusion: where “it” – GM – has been implemented, further engagement seems no longer necessary. This requires a (re-)definition of content and goals in order to position gender equality once more clearly as a valid political matter.

In the new Central and Eastern European Member States, we can sometimes observe different processes but similar needs. In these countries, the process of globalisation and the transition from socialist to capitalist systems are interconnected; quite often the cost of this transformation is distributed along gender lines, and quite often, it is women in particular phases of life who have to bear most of the burden. In addition, the call to further equality in these states is often regarded – and rejected – as an unreasonable demand by outsiders or as an unwelcome manifestation of an entirely inappropriate ideology. Yet despite this scepticism, the EU itself, as well as the international community as a whole, has actively promoted equality policies resulting in legal and institutional progress as part of the approximation of national laws with EU rules and regulations. The effects of interlocking processes on gender relations, with new Member States’ specific experiences with equality policies, is dealt with in the third part of this volume, which also highlights what Member States can contribute to a debate that is transgressing national boundaries.

What conclusions for successful equality policies can be drawn from this European comparison? This was the topic of the EU symposium “For Diversity against Discrimination – The EU Equality Acquis: Experiences, Problems and Opportunities” held by the GenderCompetenceCentre and the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth in 2007 and

funded by the EU programme for accession countries TAIEX, the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Instrument of the Institution Building Unit of Directorate-General of Enlargement of the European Commission, which aims to provide assistance in the field of approximation, application and enforcement of EU legislation. The Berlin Symposium was not only extraordinary as it was the first to discuss the implementation of European equality guidelines by new Member States. It also expanded on the original idea of TAIEX symposia, namely, that newcomers can learn from old hands. Our objective was to create a space where old and new Member States could exchange their experience in equality policies in order to discuss better and more effective strategies of promoting gender equality. Therefore, with the articles from the Netherlands, Austria, Spain, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, from Denmark by Agnete Andersen, from Bulgaria by Lazar Lazarov and from Petra Schott in her role as a representative of the EU Commission, this volume also presents contributions from the symposium.

1 The EU Defines Benchmarks for Equality

The European Union is regarded as an important proponent of gender equality – even though the public perception of Brussels by Member States is not always that of a trailblazer. One thing, however, needs to be noted: “The European policy guidelines and the case law of the European Court of Justice have played an important part in creating equality in the law between women and men.” (Erbe 2006: 11, translation GenderCompetenceCentre; see also MacRae 2006) The principle of equal pay for equal work was established as early as 1957 in the Treaty of Rome, the basis of the common European Economic Area. At the time, stakeholders wanted to protect the Common Market from wage dumping by underpaid female workers who in the Federal Republic of Germany were routinely placed in “Leichtlohngruppen” (low wage groups) – a fine instance of gender neutral labelling. For a long time, wage equality as set down in what was then Article 119 EC (and is now Article 141) remained the sole reference point for matters of equality. In the mid-seventies, the Directorates for labour and social affairs started to develop the social agenda of the European Community and focused on issues of “employment and equality”. With directives on the fundamental principles of equal pay, equal access to employment and the equal treatment of women and men in matters of social security, the EU laid the basis for a more comprehensive approach to eliminating gender related discrimination and to integrate women into the (paid) labour market more actively (see von Wahl 2005). In the nineties, the European Union passed directives on

maternity protection, parental leave and part-time work in order to facilitate reconciliation of employment and family life in its diverse manifestations. Thus, it tackled an important factor in social exclusion of mothers from certain labour markets. As Schott describes in this volume: in the new millennium, the EU's anti-discrimination directives have defined new benchmarks for equality policies.

Then, the Treaty of Amsterdam of 1997 represented a turning point in gender equality policy. Since then, primary law, in Article 2 EC, defines the strategy of Gender Mainstreaming as a cross-sectional task and as an explicit objective of the Union. Article 141 EU specifically allows for active measures to promote gender equality. In the Berlin Declaration on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 2007, the heads of state and governments again emphasised that gender equality remains of paramount importance for the EU (Berlin Declaration 2007: n.p.).

The Member States of the European Union are obliged to implement European equality directives – and this is where the real opportunities begin and where disillusionment starts. Birgit Erbe states: “National implementation remains an obstacle“ (Erbe 2006: 10, translation GenderCompetenceCentre). There is strong evidence that in the field of gender equality, Member States are often very reluctant to follow Brussels' lead.

Some of the progress that nevertheless can be observed on a national level must be attributed to financial support by the EU, e.g., the European Social Funds (cf. Meseke in this volume) or programmes to promote research (Zimmermann/Metz-Göckel 2007). In addition, some progress can be attributed more directly to activities by the Women's Movement (True/Mintrom 2001). Also, some legal achievements can be traced to individual persons or organisations, such as trade unions or scrupulous judges at national courts, taking their case to the European Court of Justice (ECJ). In such instances, the case law of the ECJ has set important standards for the approximation of EU law in national law, e.g. in the areas of wage equality, as regards the issue of “quotas” or positive action, regarding real sanctions for violations of equality law, and on the issue of indirect discrimination. In sum, the EU has found different ways of setting benchmarks for equality that no Member State can ignore.

These standards, usually referred to as the “equality acquis”, are of relevance to all countries intending to join the EU. As part of the enlargement to the east, one condition for joining is the adoption of the community's body of legislation, i.e., all its rights and obligations known as the “acquis communautaire“ (cf. Frey 2004 and Schott in this volume). The equality acquis has

to be transposed into national law. On the eve of accession to the EU, this obligation often – if not always – led to a rather speedy adaptation of national laws to reflect European Directives (Open Society Institute 2005). Progress *de jure*, however, does not necessarily lead to equality *de facto*, i.e., real social, economic and political equality between women and men in a variety of circumstances. Gender related discrimination is still a reality in all European countries, which encompasses discrimination based on gender, origin or ethnicity, age, sexual orientation and familial structure, disability, religion and culture.

2 The EU's Conflicting Signals

How can gender equality become a social reality? What political objectives, programmes and measures, based on which institutional structures and resources (or “machineries”) are needed? How are citizens made aware of new rights of equality and against exclusion, so that they will assert these rights and have them implemented? This is an issue for all Member States. But it is also the EU itself which must face the question whether and how its grand policies are appropriate to promote gender equality as an objective and if they do so at all.

The EU of the 21st century is focused on labour market and economic policies but must address social implications and involve citizens more than ever before. European gender equality policy is also strongly directed towards matters of employment and the labour market. The Lisbon Strategy, i.e., the agenda passed by the EU in 2000, calls for the development of the EU into the most competitive economic region in the world by 2010. In Lisbon, the Heads of State also stated that this could not be achieved without women: by 2010 the participation of women in the workforce is to be raised to an average of 60 %. This objective dovetails with the EU's aim to ease integration into the labour market by promoting better reconciliation between work and family life, still with a somewhat limited focus “specially for women”. At the EU summit in Barcelona in 2002, Member States agreed on a massive expansion of childcare by the year 2010. Childcare should be made available to at least 90 % of children between the age of three and the mandatory school age, and to at least a third of children under the age of three. Recently, the EU Commission has also put gender specific wage discrimination – the “gender pay gap” – onto its agenda (Network 2007). In the current “Roadmap for Equality between Men and Women” (2006), the Commission calls on Member States to begin tackling this issue and specially

published in July 2007, a communication on the topic equal pay for work of equal value.

Proponents of gender equality have however criticised the fact that the EU is pursuing neo-liberal economic and monetary policies that conflict with the equality agenda. Notably, it is women in specific social circumstances who are often primarily affected by cuts in spending and by the reduction of public services, as these services then have to be rendered unpaid and privately, which *de facto* makes it more difficult for such women to enter the labour market at all (Holz/Neusüß 2006: 10). Therefore, some argue for social policies that combat discrimination and work towards greater solidarity.

3 A Head Start for Equality in Socialism?

Any discussion of gender equality in the EU today must recognise the specificities of equality policies in former socialist countries. The definition and relevance of gender equality in the Eastern Bloc countries differed greatly from the way it was understood in the countries of Western Europe, but there are also significant differences within the “blocks”. While at the end of the sixties, the “new” women’s movement in the West took to the streets to fight for the right to abortion, for economic independence and against patriarchy, socialism proclaimed that discrimination of women had ceased long ago. Official socialist rhetoric cited labour participation rates of women of above 70 % to argue that the “woman question” had ceased to exist. An extensive public infrastructure that provided childcare and social benefits for mothers seemed to point in the same direction. However, a closer look at another dimension of gender relations qualifies this claim to full emancipation: under socialism the gender specific differentiation of labour at home and within the family lingered on mostly unaltered (cf. Nickel 1993; Dölling 1993; also Betzelt 2007: 28f.) Uta Klein elaborates: “The flip side of this ideology – emancipation is only to be achieved by women’s full-time employment – meant that the division of labour at home was not discussed. Today we are talking about a double burden for women typical for socialist countries at the time: the same amount of paid labour, but sole responsibility for house and family work” (Klein 2006: 201, translation GenderCompetenceCentre). Klein also points out the patriarchal structures of socialist systems: the image of the male provider was never fully overcome; the labour market remained segregated along gender lines horizontally as well as vertically and in politics women continued to be marginalised in spite of quotas for election into parliament.

In the early eighties, about 20 % of MPs in socialist countries were women, which was slightly above the western European average, but at cabinet level women's participation was negligible. In the true centres of power, i.e., the executive committees of the Socialist and Communist Parties, such as the Central Committee and the Politbureau, women were pushed to the margins (Klein 2006: 202f.; Miethe/Roth 2003: 15). The impact of these established structures in the new Member States after joining the Union is also the subject of some contributions to this volume.

4 Transition to Capitalism: Re-traditionalisation or a New Order for Gender Relations?

Emancipation policies that are imposed from above will always have an impact. In some new EU Member States, it is the rollback of emancipatory measures which is experienced by some as a positive development. According to the European Values Study (EVS) and the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) on attitudes towards gender equality, some view the return to the "feminine role in the family" positively, as a liberation from the double burden of paid work and family work, which is interpreted as a reaction to emancipation measures that were felt to be imposed top down (Klein 2006: 206ff.; for Estonia, cf. Voormann 2005: 322).

In Germany, however, one can observe in the new *Länder* that women continue to participate in the labour market at a high level and that there is much higher acceptance of working mothers – amongst women and men – than in the west of the country. Equally, there are far fewer reservations about putting children into day care outside the family than in many regions of the old Federal Republic of Germany. However, it may be asked what image of parenting, including fatherhood, forms the basis for these viewpoints.

Will the collapse of the socialist regimes and the transition to a capitalist economy and democratic society eventually result in a re-traditionalisation of gender relations or in the birth of a new gender order based on equality? This question has not been answered yet; it is the focus of an ongoing lively debate in politics and academia. However, voices which warn of a backlash are increasing in number (cf. Betzelt 2007: 29). One needs to bear in mind that these questions – Is equality still relevant? Have we lost the battle for emancipation or is there some progress? – cannot be answered for all transformation countries, but need to be answered for each country individually, as every nation, in spite of their shared socialist past, has a unique and specific historical, cultural and social heritage.

One needs to note, though, that it is “mostly women, who carried and still carry the larger burden of negative transformation effects” (Frey 2004: n.p., translation GenderCompetenceCentre), although it is less clear which women are affected and how. Yet generally, unemployment and poverty affected far more women than men after the dramatic break up of established social structures. Both women and men lost their jobs in huge numbers. The legal job market participation rate of women, however, decreased a lot more sharply than that of men. One of the reasons was not only the segregated labour market, where a majority of women held a disadvantaged position anyway, but also the cut back in public services, e.g., in the field of childcare. This destroyed jobs that had usually been held by women and made it also more difficult for women to combine work and family within the framework of a traditional segregation of “duties”. In addition, the extension of regulations to protect working mothers resulted in some counterproductive effects: “Especially in new private businesses, extended maternity protection timelines and parental leave rules has led to something that we have already observed in Western European countries: employers tend to prefer men and to regard women as less reliable and productive” (Klein 2006: 203ff., translation GenderCompetenceCentre). One consequence of the changing labour market and new barriers to employment has been that the gender pay gap has widened even further (Frey 2004: n.p.).

What effect does joining the EU have on gender relations and on equality policies? The Polish NGO activist Kinga Lohmann states: “The EU equality directives transposed into national law have set the basis to ensure that gender inequalities be reduced and eliminated. The EU accession process has thus raised gender awareness. However, an impact on the situation of women has been less evident.” (Lohmann in this volume). The aim of this book is to set out to analyse the impact the various EU measures have on national gender policies. We would like to contribute to deepened understanding of these issues by presenting national case studies.

5 A Comparison of Gender Policies

This volume takes into consideration not only gender equality policy from the viewpoint of different countries but also brings together the different perspectives of various stakeholders on the same subject. The ministerial executive is charged with putting equality into practice and its agents position themselves according to department, level and policy goals. Women’s organisations as stakeholders in civil society support this process by apply-

ing “pressure from below” or by being involved in consultations. Academia, ideally, often acts in a corrective manner by describing and assessing developments in society, the economy and politics, and by identifying where action should be taken. The different roles that contributors play thus create a multiplicity of perspectives on the same subject.

Contributors discuss strategies and structures related to gender equality policies from their specific standpoint. For two countries, Denmark and Bulgaria, we have the perspective of the ministerial executive complemented by contributions from academia and women’s organisations. For Lithuania the administrative and academic viewpoint are dealt with in one article. As no country has, as yet, been able to close the gap between the promise of equal rights and social equality, we asked the authors to use socioeconomic data on equality to illustrate the discrepancy that is to be expected. An appendix at the end of the book provides further information on the socioeconomic situation of women and men in Europe.

The book has four parts: *part one* gives an overview of impulses set by the EU. *Petra Schott*, as a representative of the EU Commission, presents the equality aquis, the body of relevant regulation and case law of the ECJ, something, which has to be adopted by all Member States.

The EU influences policy not only via regulations and rulings, but also via its structural policies, i.e., by providing financing through its four structural funds. The expert for European structural policy, *Henriette Meseke*, points out how funding guidelines are also subject to ever shifting political majorities and thus promote equality policies to a greater or lesser extent. Reflecting on the past funding period from 2001 to 2006 and specially on the Community Initiative EQUAL, Meseke describes how GM can be integrated positively into structural policies. She then analyses the equality objectives for the current funding period from 2007 to 2013 and identifies some instances of rollback, as Member States are now freer to decide whether to make gender equality an explicit political goal or not.

Even though TAIEX conferences are based on the concept of old hands leading the newcomers, the topic of gender equality shows how both can learn. In *part two* of this volume, it becomes evident that the new Member States can profit from the experience gained by old Member States – specially if they not only learn by imitating what is successful but by drawing their own conclusions based on what old Member States found difficult and challenging. The Netherlands, Denmark, Austria and Spain provide “old” Member State evidence on the strategy and efficacy of Gender Mainstreaming.

Dutch gender expert *Mieke Verloo* draws the conclusion that setbacks can occur in spite of good institutional structures and a long tradition of equality policies. Drawing on three examples, the Gender Impact Assessment (GIA), the evaluation of the Dutch GM-processes and the intersection of gender and integration policies, she manages to demonstrate how even good instruments and objectives can be of little avail if political and administrative support is missing. Verloo emphasises the crucial importance of the political framing using the example of “migrant women”: the very same policy can be linked to numerous objectives, reflecting governments’ differing attitudes. They can vary from respect for cultural diversity to the stigmatisation of “problematic” cultures. One central objective of gender equality policies should be to become more independent of the vagaries of politics. In the words of Verloo: “Political opportunities change, both at the level of the political and the administrative arena, and they should not have such a high influence on the quality of gender equality policies.”

The gender expert *Karen Sjørup* comes to a similar conclusion for Denmark. She attests to merely symbolic politics and progress in form only. The Equality Law of 2000 provided a legal basis for Gender Mainstreaming and an inter-ministerial working group was created to steer implementation and political practice – with little effect. The evaluation of GM processes in 2006 showed that only in rare instances did government take gender into account. Gender equality has not yet arrived in the mainstream of hegemonic discourse. Sjørup concludes that this will never happen without tackling the issue of how to alter established political power practices of inclusion and exclusion. *Agnete Andersen*, working as a gender expert for the Danish Ministry of Employment, complements the perspective of her academic colleague. After giving an elaborate overview about the history and definition of Gender Mainstreaming, she touches on the implementation of GM into the work of the Ministry of Employment in the course of the inter-ministerial GM project. Characterising the requirements for gender specific data, the gender assessment of bills at the Ministry of Employment and GM in the public employment service she gives three examples of the implementation.

The Austrian gender expert *Claudia Sorger* states that progress has been made in the creation of institutional structures but that GM is not yet firmly anchored in what constitutes everyday work. Without clear content positioning, GM is in danger of turning into an alibi strategy in Austria, too.

The implementation of GM in a decentralised country is the topic of gender expert *Elizabeth Villagómez* in her article on Spain. She observes that steps have been taken in the right direction, but also identifies a lack of political

will at the top levels of administration and a similar lack of appropriate financial resources, which severely compromises success.

Part three of this volume shows how accession to the EU boosted the establishment of a legal foundation for gender equality and of concomitant institutional structures, i.e., of what is often referred to as the “gender machinery”. Simultaneously some examples reveal how a lack of political backing and sufficient resources can effectively stall the process of putting laws and regulations into practice.

Dalia Marcinkevičienė, a researcher into gender issues and *Vanda Juršėnienė*, the head of the Gender Equality Unit at the Lithuanian Ministry of Social Security and Labour, point out how positively the EU has impacted on law and the implementation of the gender machinery in Lithuania. European influence on the practice of Gender Mainstreaming in real life, however, remains weak.

The German political scientist *Mara Kuhl* provides insights into the implementation process of GM in Estonia, the topic of her dissertation. She states that underdeveloped coordinating structures within the administration of the Estonian ministerial executive in general quite effectively hamper the implementation of a cross-sectional reform such as GM. In turn, the lack of understanding in politics and society for the legitimacy of gender equality policies renders it difficult to apply pressure. A dedicated equal opportunities elite within the administration used the boost generated by pre-accession activities to push through a strong Equal Opportunities Law. The EU can thus take credit for opening up the debate on GM in Estonia: it is debatable, though, whether the EU has rolled back its commitment a couple of years too soon, as Kuhl warns.

For Poland, *Kinga Lohmann*, Executive Director of the Central and Eastern European Women’s Network Karat, adds the perspective of women’s organisations to the debate. The aftermath of the World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and the process of joining the EU have been instances where the international community has breathed new energy into Polish equality politics and strengthened the role of women’s organisations. On Poland joining the EU, paradoxically, the situation worsened for NGOs as international financiers withdrew and the EU funds that could still be acquired were steering women’s organisations towards the topic of equality in the labour market. The election of a nationalist government in 2005 sparked a backlash in Poland which saw the dialogue between women’s organisations and the government collapse: in the area of gender equality massive setbacks had to be accepted, e.g., in abortion law.

The Prague gender expert *Petr Pavlík* states that the equality *acquis* of the EU has also led to progress in the field of gender equality in the Czech Republic. He is, however, critical of Czech equality policies and their impact on real life. He identifies a lack of expertise and strategic framing in fighting gender inequality effectively. Pavlík also criticises the EU: if it is obvious that EU regulations are not abided by – as is the case in the Czech Republic’s use of EU subsidies – an effective control mechanism must be set in motion.

The advisor on gender issues *Regina Barendt*, who lived in Bulgaria for a long time, also reports unsatisfactory implementation of gender equality policies into national policies there and addresses her criticism at the EU: during the accession process, it should have insisted far more strictly on the creation of working structures promoting equality. An analysis of the social and economic position of women and men in Bulgaria also shows that real equality is not in view. *Lazar Lazarov*, a former advisor in the Bulgarian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, who has since risen to the rank of Deputy Minister, paints a far more positive picture: the “National Action Plan for Promotion of Gender Equality” contributes to improving women’s position in the labour market and their economic independence. Lazarov specially highlights the dialogue with civil society that has taken hold: since the mid-nineties, NGOs with a focus on gender equality have begun to participate in the transformation process and brought it forward substantially.

When analysing the situation in Slovenia, *Vlasta Jalušič*, *Roman Kuhar* and *Ana Frank* emphasise lines of tradition in gender equality that can be traced to socialist times, i.e., equal access to education, full-time employment for women, job security, reproductive rights and childcare facilities. NGOs active in the field of equality and a gender machinery committed to the task managed to salvage socialist achievements which provided the foundation for the eventual adoption of the equality *acquis*.

In *part four* of this volume, gender expert *Silke Steinhilber* offers a reasoned critique of current developments and future challenges. The approximation of legal standards and the creation of institutional structures in the new Member States can be deemed a success, even if the adoption of the equality *acquis* without public debate must be read as an indication of the low significance afforded to equality policies in these countries and equally low interest in this topic. The “gender machineries” created at the time of the adoption of the *acquis* are somewhat hamstrung as they have little influence and can access only few resources while facing massive tasks. It remains to be seen how the partial extension of their brief to cover anti-discrimination policies as well will play out. The momentum that was generated in the area

of equality when these countries were preparing to join the EU also put new energy into women's organisations and strengthened their role; this impetus has, however, decreased significantly since accession took place. Steinhilber argues that it is one of the great challenges of the future to sustain achievements gained so far.

Steinhilber's conclusion calls for a whole range of reactions. One central question is how achievements can be secured so that they will not fall victim to ever-changing political constellations in the future. It is required of the EU that it fulfils its controlling function far more seriously. This will need quite a lot of conviction as the EU today is very different from the one that put GM into the Treaty of Amsterdam and the one that rode on the crest of the wave generated by the Beijing conference on Women: after the heyday of social democracy in the nineties the EU's decision-making bodies today reflect altered political majorities in Member States. In addition to expansion to the east, globalised developments that are touched on briefly above have impacted on the political orientation of the EU and have furthered the prioritisation of economic and employment policies.

On a national level, instead of numerous instances of lip service, real political backing is required which would also need to be translated into the provision of adequate resources for the purpose of promoting gender equality. It is also obvious that society needs to debate and come to an understanding about the concrete objectives of equality policies: what does a society look like that really does justice to men and women? Our Europe-wide survey shows: although countries might be different, the challenges are similar. This applies not only to the obstacles that proponents of gender equality face, but also to the topics that can be found on the agenda. The localisation of these challenges within specific societal arrangements of equality, freedom and justice, however, usually differs. Specific national contexts and differing political frames will also generate different answers to these challenges. In order to find better answers, an intensified exchange on specific experiences and improved networking is desired.

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