



Regional Women's Lobby for South East Europe

Regionalni ženski Lobi za Jugoistočnu Evropu

Lobi Rajonal i Grave për Evropën Juglindore

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WOMEN IN THE REGION – WHERE ARE WE TODAY?

Women represent half of the population of the world, however, they do not represent how of political, economic, social or any other power. This is simply a fact that we all know, and which in a way is self understood and with which we have been faced for many years now – at national, regional and international level. In this context and looking into the history, since the adoption of UN Beijing Declaration in 1995, we may say that major changes have occurred, especially in the declarative and legislative aspect, nevertheless we are far from achieving a real gender equality and true equal and democratic society. However, lately we notice some stagnation tendencies which may be viewed from several aspects, primarily in the context of global economic crisis, both in economy and in restructuring and rebalancing political positions in the global level. Things are developing rapidly, almost with a lightning speed, in today's "global village" and it seems that as women we are again losing the pace, we are losing the breath.

Let us try to analyze this issue through the example of Croatia, where it is safe to say that we have a quite developed, almost impressive, legal and institutional framework in the field of gender equality. Now we have adopted the second Law on gender equality, Law against discrimination, and the second Law on protection from domestic violence, fourth national strategy on gender equality, national strategy on the protection from domestic violence, national program for the protection and promotion of human rights and a number legal acts and bylaws that may be applied in the field of gender equality. In addition to this, a system of state institutions is in place the purpose of which is to establish and apply legal mechanisms on gender equality in all levels and in all components of the society, and of course we are also bound to apply a number of international conventions and covenants in which we are signatories. In sum, we cannot complain that no real gender structure and machinery has

been established in Croatia, the primary function of which is to implement gender awareness policies.

What is also important, after the last parliamentary elections, some important aspects of gender policies have been incorporated in the program of Government of Republic of Croatia, what represents a major success which first and foremost was a result of the intensive work of united women factions of coalition parties, which created their own women coalition in order to support integration of gender policies in pre-electoral and subsequently, post-electoral programs. And we were successful.

At the regional level – situation is the same when it comes to legal and institutional framework – agencies, lawyers, policies, laws, and strategies – are more or less in place.

But what is happening now? Why we still do not see this gender equality in the entire region? The answer to this question primarily lies in the fact that there are still (not enough) women in important decision making bodies, such as parliament, city councils or regions, in leading political positions, in positions of directors and managers and similar... and that despite many important program changes, it still may happen, for example, that the number of women in Croatian parliament stagnates. In the early 90s about 5% of members of parliament were women, after the announcement of parliamentary elections last year it was 25% (mainly as result of replacements), whereas after the elections the situation was much worse – only 19.8% women were directly elected to the parliament. Today, however, the situation has improved where 24% members sitting in the parliament are women, mainly as result of replacements since their male colleagues have moved to ministerial or other positions in the executive.

In the case of Croatia, but also at the regional context, in the last ten years we have seen a stagnation of the number of women in leading positions; there is mainly a difference of 1-2% in the number elected women, which means that there is no major development in this regard.

Taking this into consideration it is not a surprise that women are giving up and are becoming less and less interested to enter into politics, since all good things that are written and for which we have been fighting for years (quotas are introduced and set by the law) continue to remain only on paper, particularly when we come to the key moment, that is, when it is decided who will be included in candidate lists and in what position?! An answer to this problem lies in the fact that regulation of internal hierarchy of political parties still continues to be in the hands of men and this often represents an obstacle for bigger

participation of women, which particularly reflects in their position in voting lists. Furthermore, maybe women do not find themselves in intra-party tricks or competition or they simply do not have the strength to fight in this plan as well and to prove themselves in a more or less traditional man environment. Therefore, they are inclined to get involved in informal, nongovernmental and civil activism where their techniques of negotiation, advocacy networking and other are more appreciated.

Now the problem is only whether we can go on like this? Are we sick and tired of this stagnation and status quo? Can we change something in our approaches? Can we initiate negotiations or other agreements, change strategies in regard to attracting and involving other new women whom we want to see part of the process, and which today are not interested enough for this? How can we make the gender equality become part of their sphere of interest? Personally, I support the beginning of a new dialogue between women politicians, NGOs and also representatives of institutions as well as in the political parties. We have to change something because it appears to me that the strong laws, policies, agencies and strategies have “put us to sleep”; as if we have altogether believed that with their adoption things will move themselves on the direction we want them. Today we see that that is not so.

Therefore, it would be interesting to see, especially in the Croatian example, how successful we will be in achieving our goals, which we have managed to incorporate even in the program of newly elected social democratic Government, and whether the achievement of this goals will help in further empowerment of women, particularly in regard to obtaining and assuming more responsibilities at different levels. In the future, I consider this would be crucial, particularly when we take into consideration the fact that by middle of next year Croatia will become an integral part of Europe, and there, when it comes to women and their position nothing is like “heaven” and there is no doubt that we will have to fight for the protection of the level of rights we enjoy today. And the outcome of this fight will be extremely important also for the region.

For RWL:

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