Protocol of the Round-table discussion on "Low Participation of Women in Politics: A Reality Set in Stone in the Visegrád Countries?" 29th October 2012

Andrea Pető, chair of the conference introduced the two main aims:
- reconsider the obstacles to women's participation in politics in CEE region
- collect best practices of collaboration in order to increase women's participation in decision making

Gabriella Ilonszki: Hungary – "In the last place? Women in political decision making. 25 years of experience"

- what explains Hungary's last position among former communist countries, now EU member states, in the statistics on the small number of women MPs?
- "women do not participate in politics, because they don't come forward", in other words, it is women's fault that they are underrepresented in politics, because they shy away from participating in it – This stereotype was proven to be wrong, based on statistical data
- the gender hierarchy is similar on the national and the local level in Hungary
- women's participation in political parties: The Hungarian example from previous years shows that when the party suffers electoral losses, women are pushed backward
- no Hungarian political parties have gender equality on their agenda
- it pays to be non gender-sensitive in politics
- national survey in 2010 showed that the population supports legislative measures, such as quotas, to increase women's equal representation in politics (men: 50,7%, women: 55,7%)
- Political scientists argue that the number of women participating in decision making has to be increased – This numeric approach is not satisfactory, because it is also vital to analyze on what level women participate in politics
- There are new social movements in Hungary, such as the recent initiative against domestic violence, which could be a motor of future movements.

Andrea Pető identified two main points of Ilonszki's presentation:

- understanding the systemic obstacles
- call for coalitional mobilization, which requires to identify the agents of change.

This discussion is timely in Hungary because of two reasons:

- the quota debate is on EU's agenda
- the examples of Polish and Czech women's coalitional mobilizing worked well

Question to Gabriella Ilonszki: Were the parties self-reflexive about excluding gender from their agenda? Her reply was that her research did not concentrate on that aspect.
Andrea Pető's comment: self-reflexivity is a naïve expectation of political parties.
"Politics is men's world", in which the loyalty to the party is of utmost importance, thus, our aim should be to work together, form coalitions, not to concentrate on political parties.

Jana Smiggels Kavková: "Women in Decision Making: Czech Republic"

- The presentation focused on the ongoing change initiated by women's groups (Fórum 50% and Czech Women's Lobby) and the successful "Chicken Campaign"
- During the 20years after transition no positive change regarding gender equality happened, there were "more important issues" in the democratization process.
- There are relatively high numbers of women MPs in the Czech Parliament (22%) thanks to the preferential votes, which Czech citizens in the previous three elections gave to women MPs. This is referred to as the "preferential votes revolution".

- Therefore, it is not the public opinion but the parties that are the biggest obstacle to change.
- The 1st Czech Women's Congress will take place on March 8, 2013 on International Women's Day ("the only day when all media are allowed to write about women's rights").
- The congress is organized bottom-up, including workshops where women can voice "their own ideas".
- The change of the name of Council of Equality to Equal Opportunities signals deeper changes in the priorities of governments.
- The humorous "Chicken Tour" campaign was very successful, received much media coverage and had an impact on the "preferential votes revolution".
- Women work together in coalitional women's groups and work within the system as well, in the Committee on Equal Representation of Women and men in Politics and Decision Making.
- The Committee's work is mainly drafting strategies, proposals, suggesting quotas, which are usually refused, but the committee's work opens up the discussion between women's organizations and the government.

Andrea Pető underlined the 3 main points of Jana Kavková's presentation:

1. Democracy: the parties as main obstacles to gender equality has wider implications for the definition of democracy. Women's organizations should answer the question: "How democracy can work for us?"
2. Language: the changes in the wordings are important signs to interpret. For example: In UK instead of quota, the expression "temporary enhancing measures" is used.
3. Coalitional mobilization: women's groups with different agendas can work together, change from "watchdogs" to pressure groups, which involves a change in their identity.

Question to Jana Kavková: How are Romani women represented in the Czech Parliament? 1. The issue of Romani women will be addressed during the 1st Czech Women's Congress, which aims to push forward the agenda of the "most marginalized" women. 2. There is no representation of Romani women in the Czech Parliament today.

Andrea Pető's question to Jana Kavková:
The coalition between different women's organizations in the Czech Republic is impressive. What best practices can you name which would enhance such co-operation?
Kavková's reply: 1. Working together with NGOs under the umbrella organization of Czech Women's Lobby. 2. Organizing networking meetings for female politicians from the same and different parties.

Darina Malová: Low Participation of Women in Politics: The Case of Slovakia

- Her analysis based on opinion polls and media research
- The structural, cultural or institutional explanations do not justify women's underrepresentation in politics, it is the agency-based approach which explains it.
- Women are excluded from politics in Slovakia similarly as they were 20yrs ago.
- Max. 20% of men and women are in favour of measures such as quota, 28% supports the parties' voluntary quotas
- What are the reasons for this? Is the new generation missing? Are these neglected issues?
- Without agency, critical mass, women's NGOs, the public opinion cannot be changed.

Andrea Pető's question to Darina Malová: A. Pető questioned whether the concept of agency is relevant in this case and suggested to rephrase it as the "construction of political subjectivities".

She also pointed out that it would be advisable to show a direction for action, possible change, instead of pursuing a static approach.

Darina Malová's reply:

- A philosophical debate surrounds the concept of agency, however, according to the political scientist understanding of agency, it is not isolated from political action. Collective actions and individual organizers are both needed to enhance social change. The Slovakian feminist movement is too old, needs to be renewed.
- Malová also reflected on the use of the category gender instead of women. Her use of the category reflects the political realities in Slovakia. Before entering the EU there was a Committee for Gender Equality, which after 2006 was changed to Committee of Women's Issues, now it is called Human Rights and Minority Rights and Women's Rights, "the triad". The Office for Gender Mainstreaming was incorporated into the Ministry of Social Affairs after 2006.

Question to Darina Malová about Iveta Radičova, former prime minister of Slovakia and about possible role models for female politicians:

- **Malová** differentiated between women in top positions versus women leaders, the leaders embrace gender quality as their mission, while women in top positions may be indifferent to the issue.
- The prime minister, Radičova was not supported by her party, she became isolated, which had a tragic impact on Slovakian society, that is, it reinforced the stereotype that women are too weak for politics.

Andrea Pető asked Jana Kavková to reply to the question as well.
Role models in the Czech Republic: There are no leading figures, because identifying with this issue means "political suicide". Women usually fulfill symbolic positions in the Czech Parliament, such as Miroslava Niemcova, who is the Chair of Parliament.

Andrea Pető's reflection on Malová's talk:

1. A. Pető disagreed that "time stands still" in the 20 years after the systemic changes, arguing that this period had an impact on the civil society of the region, influenced our thinking about democracy. 20 years ago the hope was still there, and the belief in neoliberal democracy, now only the doubt remained: "Is this a democracy for all?"
2. Institutional problems: the institutional frameworks in Europe are shaken, the economic crisis is brought up as an alibi to curb the funding of gender equality programs, institutions. The closing down of the Nordic Institute for Gender Research is an example of this process, which signals that Europe is no longer the normative power it was.

A. Pető concluded that the 20 years after the collapse of communism should be viewed critically in order to learn from previous strategic mistakes.

<u>Kazimiera Szczuka: The Women's Congress (Kongres Kobiet) in Poland</u>

- Review of statistical data: During the 1980s there were 23% women (parliament was obviously a symbolic institution), 1990s it decreased to 10%, after the last elections 24%.
- The critical mass, 30% would be needed, as it was pointed out by Malgorzata Fuszara, an expert on quotas.
- Szczuka emphasized: Claiming quotas, even parities are not considered as excessive demands (70% of Poles are in favour of quotas), it is the liberalization of abortion law that is a controversial issue.
- It would be almost impossible to change the Polish legislations so that contraception would be funded, abortion would be decriminalized or Polish women's access to legal abortion would not be limited.

- The "Secret" of Kongres Kobiet's success:
  - It combines the radical claims of street activism (Manifa, a radical feminist event, from 2009 onwards, is organized on the streets of Warsaw on each International Women's Day) with the Kongres Kobiet: (upper-) middle class women, political elite. These are two sides of a continuum, which overlap, some activists are engaged in both groups, they work together efficiently.
  - they created an image of women's solidarity movements (there are moments where it works)
  - The horizontality and equality are important characteristics of a women's movement, at the same time, leading figures are also needed, such as Magdalena Środa, Agnieszka Graf, who give their faces to the movement.
  - Środa: a key person, a charismatic figure, either hated or loved; she strengthens the people involved in the movement.
  - Jolanta Kwaśniewska: a "treasure" for the movement, extremely loved; partner in the issue VAW.
  - The Polish women's movement is a politics of cooperation and alliance, it is a platform of negotiations
  - The success of Kongres Kobiet is a success of informal relations.
  - At the beginning they described their movement as dealing with "women's issues", not as "feminist".
  - The prime minister visits Kongres Kobiet each year, sympathizes with feminist goals, but his sympathy "lasts for one afternoon" and does not lead to changes in policies.
  - Danuta Hübner (ex-MEP) is the PM in the shadow cabinet of the Congress – she is highly respected, not perceived as a crazy feminist

- The Kongres Kobiet is criticised from different perspectives, it is mainly a class criticism, according to which it is elitist, because middle-class women are overrepresented. That's why this year the Kongres Kobiet focused on women from small villages, who could meet politicians. There were panels of 50 to thousand participants, a networking event, with more than 8000 women.
- Another criticism is that this platform is "given", which "domesticates women in an acceptable way", also it accepts the market as main regulative power.
- The funding of the Kongres Kobiet is partially from Ministry of Labour, so this is an "NGO that is a GO" and also from private fundings.

- For feminists who participate in the movement it is crucial to enjoy it, as Emma Goldman put it: "If I cannot dance, it's not my revolution."

K. Szczuka envisioned two scenarios about the future of Kongres Kobiet:

- According to the positive one: The impact of the activism on women is growing, there are signs of it already, it is said that Polish women are "on a reproductive strike". In the end, the activism will be successful and the political representation of women will also achieve the 30% critical mass.
- According to the negative one: "Patriarchy manipulates us", it seems as if the Kongres Kobiet would amount to some change, but in reality women's frustration is being channeled through this movement, but this would not lead to wider change, on the contrary, it would calm down the women's urge for change.

Darina Malová added a critical reflection to her talk towards the end of the conference:
Malová reviewed her critical view on Slovakia as a result of the conference and voiced her admiration for Polish feminists who keep doing their work and face public hatred. There have been positive changes concerning women's issues in Slovakia, such as,

- the success of the “Every fifth woman” campaign against domestic violence, which was a coordinated action of NGOs that lead to implementation and slow change of public opinion.
- the abortion law is widely considered to be kept liberal
- equal pay became an accepted issue, the NGOs changed the public opinion
- Lucia Nicholson, the previous minister of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of Slovakia as a woman leader, who is sensitive to gender issues.

Andrea Pető’s conclusion:

- The reconceptualization of citizenship in the past few years as social citizenship and intimate citizenship may be relevant in thinking about women’s participation in decision making.
- The welfare systems are trembling down in all parts of Europe, women’s political activism is very much needed in this situation
- We learnt positive best practices from countries, which are “close to us both historically and politically”.

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