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**EU Enlargement in 2004**  
**East-West Priorities and Perspectives from**  
**Women Inside and Outside the EU**

*Discussion Paper*  
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## 1. Introduction

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The principal aim of this paper is to capture some of the views and attitudes among women's rights activists, politicians, and leaders of women's groups in countries within the European Union (EU) and those still outside, on the implications for further advancement of gender equality in an enlarged Europe. Towards the expected entry of ten new countries to the EU in May 2004, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) invited the two authors, academics representing a EU country and an accession country, to write this paper as a starting point for further dialogue and constructive debate among women of the region. The paper also strives to provide food for thought for other stakeholders (including the EU, governments, donors, international organizations such as UNIFEM and others), which could be helpful in informing future strategies, policy or programme directions.

The EU plays a major role in guaranteeing gender equality in their member states. On the basis of the different gender equality directives of the EU and of the Treaty of Amsterdam, national governments are required to develop mechanisms to achieve gender equality and to integrate gender mainstreaming in all their policies. In the context of the accession process, towards meeting EU directives, candidate countries have taken or plan to take important steps to revise or adopt new laws, as well as to take other measures that guarantee gender equality.

Women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a critical role in lobbying for gender equality initiatives in all fields of concern and holding the EU and national governments accountable – not just for meeting EU directives *de jure*, but ensuring their *de facto* enforcement. The struggle for achieving full equality between women is still ongoing in all parts of Europe. While in some parts of Europe the advancements achieved in gender equality are regarded a model for emulation by women worldwide, in other parts of Europe progress is considerably lagging in many respects. Gender equality advocates, both in the West and in the East, are hopeful that processes of accession and integration into the EU will translate into positive change for women in the region. Yet, concerns are also raised on both sides that merit attention and consideration. Venues for open and honest dialogue between women from the West and East are too few and far between. In airing out the differences, and more importantly, shedding light on the commonalities, this paper hopes to contribute to the development of a common strategic future direction for advancement of women's rights in Europe and beyond.

The authors wish to acknowledge with thanks all those who have contributed their time and efforts in responding to the questionnaire or participating in interviews. They would like to extend thanks to Silke Roth from the University of Pennsylvania for her helpful comments. They further wish to extend thanks to UNIFEM Central and Eastern Europe Office for the opportunity to work on this paper, and especially to Osnat Lubrani, UNIFEM Programme Director for her inputs and guidance.

The authors would like to emphasize that this paper should be regarded as a work in progress. Based on the discussions and debate that this draft will hopefully generate, there is room for its continuous adaptation and development.

## 2. Method

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This paper draws on selected interviews and consultations, via phone or in person, with representatives of women's organizations and networks working at local, national and/or regional level, as well as academics, governmental and non-governmental women activists – from EU countries, countries that are set to join the EU in 2004, countries scheduled to join the EU at a later date, as well as other countries of the region that are not EU candidates.

In addition a questionnaire, designed to determine women's personal views, was sent to selected national women's organizations, regional networks, academics, governmental and non-governmental women activists in different fields focusing on European Enlargement and gender equality issues in selected Western European, accession as well as non-accession countries.<sup>1</sup> The authors invited interviewees to express their personal views with the understanding that these would be treated as confidential and do not necessarily reflect the views of the organizations they represent. Out of a total of 88 questionnaires, 42 were returned or filled out in an interview.<sup>2</sup> The questions sought to gauge the perceived positive and negative implications for gender equality in EU accession, expected cooperation between women's organisations in the extended European Union and implications for further advancement of gender equality in an enlarged Europe.

Between September and December 2003, the authors participated in several conferences that brought together women activists from the region.<sup>3</sup> Besides drawing on relevant documentation produced towards or as an outcome of these meetings (see Bibliography), the Conferences provided an opportunity to invite participants' inputs and ideas. Parts of the paper, basic ideas and/or the paper itself have since been introduced and exchanged by the authors at several conferences.<sup>4</sup>

## 3. Eastern Perspectives on Enlargement

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In the context of the EU accession process and meeting various directives, candidate countries are called upon to adjust national legal and institutional frameworks so as to accelerate their transition to a market economy, but also to strengthen human rights standards, and democratic, civic and political policies and practices. Gender equality came relatively late onto the agenda of negotiations for entry to the EU. Much greater priority was placed on social and economic reforms based on neo-liberal principles that were lacking a gender perspective. Women in accession countries have increasingly raised concerns over the

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<sup>1</sup> Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Macedonia, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, USA.

<sup>2</sup> Poland and Germany are slightly over represented.

<sup>3</sup> KARAT-Conference, 7-8 November 2003, Warsaw; WOMNET-Conference, 15-16 December 2003, Berlin; Expert-Workshop, Women's Academy Munich (FAM)/Harried Taylor Mill-Institute, Berlin School of Economics, 19 December 2003.

<sup>4</sup> 'Europa Kult', Heinrich Boell Conference, 19-20th March, Leipzig (see [www.boell.de](http://www.boell.de)); 'Give Women the Voice!', Oska conference, 19th of April, Warsaw (see [www.oska.org.pl](http://www.oska.org.pl)); 'Women's Perspectives on European Citizenship Empowerment through participation', EWEC Conference, 29 April - 2 May, Salzburg, organized by EWEC (=Empowerment of Women trough active European Citizenship), EWEC is a four country network (Spain, Austria, Czech Republic, Germany), Serbia and Switzerland are associated) developing a European curriculum for women. (The Women's Cooperative WeiberWirtschaft in Berlin is the German partner), (see: [www.ewec.net/](http://www.ewec.net/))

disproportionate negative consequences for women in social security and pension systems, as well as other areas of exclusion or discrimination. They have pointed to the prevailing weakness of mechanisms, which are needed to ensure effective implementation of EU gender-equality directives.

Coinciding with the accession process, many candidate countries have seen a dramatic decline in women's political participation in context of transition. In several CEE countries some improvement has been seen; due in great part to effective advocacy by women's groups and networks<sup>5</sup>. Questions remain, however, whether the progress achieved can be sustained in the longer term. Women in politics overall remain vastly under-represented. Many women in accession countries who achieve political positions are not necessarily sensitive to issues of gender inequality or women's equal rights. Many would be reluctant to associate themselves with such issues, particularly at election time - for fear that such association might in fact decrease their chances of success. The socialist legacy has also instilled among women in the East and the public at large an aversion to the placing of quotas or other positive measures to achieve gender equality in politics.

Liberalization of the economy combined with drastic social reforms have translated into increasing gaps between the increasingly poor and the newly rich, as well as between women and men. Unemployment rates have escalated in many CEE countries. While both women and men have been adversely affected by high unemployment rates, women experience discrimination in access and re-entry to the labor market, especially in high paying sectors, in spite of their sometime higher levels of education, as compared to men.

In the context of accession, and through women's activism, women's rights are today increasingly framed as human rights, entailing duties and obligations that must figure on public and political agendas. Problems of different forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, as well as the pervasive problem of trafficking in women, are receiving increased attention across the region. However, they are as yet far from being adequately addressed.

Civil society in accession countries plays a critical and growing role in advancing democratization. Gender equality advocates and groups are increasingly recognized as important agents for social as well as political change in the transition and accession processes. Activities of women's groups have focused on issues ranging from addressing violence against women, protection of women's sexual and reproductive rights, increasing women's participation in political and public life, but more recently, also women's economic rights, including addressing discrimination against women in the labor market, women's equal opportunities in new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), etc.

In the post-communist era, several indigenous regional networks of NGOs have emerged that are playing a critical role in building consensus and facilitating partnerships between women in the region, as well as engaging in advocacy at regional level and promoting linkages at the global level. For example, KARAT-Coalition, whose members include NGOs both in accession and non-accession countries, has lately focused women's attention on economic issues that are of increasing concern to women in context of accession to the EU. KARAT, as well as other groups and networks such as Network of East West Women-Polska (NEWW/P) have also more generally increased women's knowledge of EU institutions, what EU accession processes are all about and their relevance to the protection of women's rights. Another important network, ASTRA, has focused on sexual and reproductive rights in CEE

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<sup>5</sup> In Poland women's participation in parliament has increased to 20% and in Bulgaria participation has increased to 25%.

and some Western European (e.g. Belgium). Such networks have been instrumental in building bridges between women in different countries in the region – irrespective of their plans to join the EU, but also have facilitated greater collaboration with women in EU member States.

### **3.1 Perceived Negative Consequences**

Many women activists in the East voice concern that they might not be recognized as equal partners alongside their counterparts in the ‘older’ member states upon their country’s entry to the EU. Most women in the East emphasize that they share common problems and priorities that are highly specific to the legacy of communism. They worry that their needs, arising from their specific situation and condition, will be marginalized or inadequately brought to the attention of European bodies, within a larger European women’s constituency whose interests and concerns may diverge from those of women in accession countries. Women in the East also voice concern that accession of some countries to the EU will jeopardize or weaken their relationship with women in countries that will remain outside the Union.

In all the interviews conducted, women raised the concern that economic profits are excessively becoming values of primary importance in their societies. Many mentioned the increasing difficulty experienced by women in entry to the labour market, especially older women, handicapped women and women of ethnic minority groups. There is concern that EU directives are leading to overemphasis on economic considerations at the expense of much needed attention to other areas that are of great concern to women. Gender mainstreaming policies, are viewed by many women with suspicion or scepticism. Many content that gender mainstreaming in their countries remains limited to formal statements that are not translated into practice, and which in the worst case scenario can at times serve to dilute the women’s rights and empowerment perspective.

There is apprehension among many women leaders and activists that donors and international organizations, who until now have supported gender equality initiatives, are pulling out under the assumption that their support will no longer be needed and that remaining needs could be provided for by EU Structural Funds. While women in the East recognize and welcome the new opportunities to receive EU support for their work, they point out that knowledge on how to access EU funds is limited and often concentrated within the hands of a few organizations (who are not always generous in sharing such knowledge more widely). Women’s organizations may need to review their institutional structures to see whether these need to be adapted to a new reality where their budgets will rely more heavily on public funds.

### **3.2 Perceived Benefits**

Women in the East express high hopes that the legal rights and directives of the EU and higher standards of the older members of the EU will have a positive impact on gender equality policies in the accession countries. There is still much hope for a new European constitution that would strengthen accountability of European nations to fulfill their obligations to implement gender equality and gender mainstreaming, although others are less optimistic in light of attempts by some countries to block this process, Poland in particular<sup>6</sup>.

CEE women express hope that EU enlargement will lead to greater cooperation and exchange with women activists in other parts of Europe, but also with women in non-European

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<sup>6</sup> It is worth mentioning that in a letter widely publicized in Poland, Germany and France, Polish intellectuals and advocates expressed their opposition to the Polish Government’s position and emphasized that there are other voices in Poland who are in favor of freedom and equality and are opposed to religious conservatism.

countries. Some believe that political action towards gender equality could be strengthened through joint initiatives and networks, pointing to positive examples that are already taking place with the Network Women in Development Europe (WIDE), among others.<sup>7</sup> Some women have mixed feelings about the implications of representation by the European Women's Lobby (EWL) at regional level, and hope to ensure that as 'Eastern' entities, they would be able to maintain an independent voice, and develop their own direct contact with EU bodies. Others are more positive about cooperation with EWL as a means for opening opportunities to identify and work more effectively towards common goals. They also see such collaboration as opening up greater possibilities for them to professionalize and strengthen their working methods and strategies.

As already noted, women do see great importance in ensuring that women's organizations are able to access European Structural Funds, but call for greater support to build their knowledge and capacity to facilitate their access to such support. Many are optimistic that the approach of gender mainstreaming combined with a monitoring process, promises to strengthen gender equality in their countries. Many hope that gender budget analysis could be applied as a tool for bringing gender justice in the economic sphere.

Many activists point out that increased recognition of women's rights as human rights offers new opportunities to advance gender equality through human rights frameworks. Women see important benefits in EU anti-discrimination directives, which they expect will contribute to increased respect for human rights, irrespective of the political leaning of a particular government. They also hope that with the accession of their countries to the EU, gender mainstreaming could become a more powerful and meaningful tool for advancing change.

#### **4. Western Perspectives on EU Enlargement**

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Overall, Western European women activists either have not begun or are only just beginning to express interest in the question of the impact of EU-enlargement. Many are more likely to relate political and economic developments in Europe to processes of globalization rather than to intra-regional trends and processes such as EU accession.

Western Europe is by no means homogenous, and there are considerable differences between Western European countries in terms of the social and political culture, and approaches to economic development or to social or welfare policies. Divergence can also be seen with regard to the status of gender equality. Spain and Greece are still far from fully translating EU directives into practice. With the exception of the Scandinavian countries, EU laws and directives are more progressive than the national legislation that is in place in most EU member countries.

Women's participation in parliamentary politics has consistently increased, and in some countries has surpassed 30% (e.g. in Scandinavian countries, Netherlands, as well as in

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<sup>7</sup> WIDE was founded in 1985 (after the World Conference in Nairobi) as a NGO. The general approach of WIDE is to sensitize European and International organizations towards gender issues within development policies. WIDE is a human rights and advocacy organization that monitors international economic and development policy and practice from a feminist perspective, focusing on the EU, UN and WTO.

Germany). However, in other EU member states, the percentage of national women parliamentarians remains low (around 10% in France, Greece, Italy).<sup>8</sup>

Over the past decades, women's organizations and networks have grown and diversified considerably. Rather than a single unified Women's Movement, different strands of feminist thinking and practice can be distinguished in some countries. Women's organizations range from small and medium project-based organizations and grassroots groups, to large well-established organizations as well as professional associations of women focusing on specific fields (law, entrepreneurship, science, etc.). The European Women's Lobby (EWL), founded in 1990 and based in Brussels, is the principle EU network focusing on regional-level advocacy for the gender equality agenda.

At national level, NGOs are today viewed by many women as having become less politicized in comparison with past years, and having a lesser impact on social and economic reforms than they previously had. Many organizations receive public support to sustain their basic infrastructure (office rent, staff salaries, etc.), although in many countries funding levels have decreased considerably over the past few years. Consequently, many have experienced a dwindling in membership and shrinking of their constituencies of support.

In Western Europe, women's activism and organizing had been strongly associated with the development of Women's or Gender Studies programmes or departments in universities. Although women-focused studies have contributed to theoretical debates related to gender politics, many today note that with increased specialization and focus on theory, these academic circles have lost their political edge. Many women activists voice disappointment with the apparent disconnect between academia and women's political human rights agenda.

Women in Western Europe are deeply concerned by the economic crisis in Europe and by the impact by the rise in unemployment on growing marginalization of women. Inequalities between women and men linked to systemic gender discrimination continue to persist in varying degrees across Western Europe.

Reconciliation of career and family responsibilities remains a top concern, considerably more so for women than for men. It is important to note however, that the situation varies from country to country: it is easier for a woman to combine career and family life in France or in Scandinavia, than it is in Germany or Spain, mainly due to the availability (or lack of) of a well functioning childcare system. In Western Europe, the share of female entrepreneurs has seen a constant but slow increase and currently stands at approximately 28%. However, women are for the most part involved in small business enterprises and they continue to face disproportionate difficulties in accessing credit, training, or other forms of support, as compared to men.

Women with low levels of education continue to face the greatest barriers to employment, but increasingly for many women, higher education does not guarantee access to employment. Occupational segregation of women in mostly low-paying low-status jobs persists although some improvement is noted. An increasing number of low-paid, informal and mostly female workers originating from Central and East Europe, and who now live in the West, are surviving through work in farming, taking care of children and elderly people, or providing cleaning services. For older, poorly educated women, as well as women burdened with child-

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<sup>8</sup> Although the 2000 parity law in France had positive effects in the field of local and regional elections (increasing the number of women in regional parliaments from 25.7% in 1995 to 47.5% in 2001), it has not yet had an effect in the national parliament.

care or those who have left the labor market in order to raise children and have not held a job for a long period of time; reentry to the labor market has become increasingly difficult.

Prostitution and trafficking of women from CEE-Countries to Western Europe is on the rise. In some countries of Western Europe, prostitution has been recognized as legal work, although approaches and attitudes vary by country (in Scandinavia prostitution is conclusively regarded as a form of violence against women and legislation criminalizes the client).

#### **4.1 Perceived Negative Consequences**

Many western European activists speak of their concern that the ‘European project’ will remain a project of the elites rather than one that is owned by the peoples of Europe. With respect to the EU enlargement, some concerns are raised that European bodies might become more conservative regarding gender equality affairs. The notion that entry of the new members might threaten the re-opening of discussions over issues such as the placing of quotas or other positive measures, or lead to increased religious conservatism – is not always grounded in fact, and in the authors’ view, projects a degree of prejudice. Low representation of women in the European Parliament is a concern to women in West, but many others also express skepticism that increased representation of women will necessarily carry a positive impact on the advancement of gender equality and gender mainstreaming.

Many women were critical of the fact that the EU is primarily seen as an economic community in which citizens become ‘clients’ and are regarded as ‘economic-citizens’. Women and gender politics are seen as increasingly subordinate to economic interests. Many predict that inequality within the economy will increase and lead to an increase in poverty among women, and societies at large; social rights will decrease; liberalization of the economy and the ‘economization of society’ will lead to increase in re-privatization (e.g. of care-work) and individualism. Many also voice concern that more restrictive immigration policies could lead to even more discrimination and violence against ethnic minorities.

#### **4.2 Perceived Benefits**

In Western Europe many women also express hope for the potentially innovative, positive effects of the EU as a community of human rights, tolerance and diversity at the national level. Women welcome anti-discrimination policies as an impetus for national governments to assume their responsibilities more fully and effectively. Many women hope that a Charter of Fundamental Human Rights will eventually accompany the European constitution. The importance of having the EU as a progressive framework that is invested in social, economic and human rights; is especially seen as important in situations where national governments are elected that are conservative or even right-wing oriented, as has recently occurred in some countries (e.g. Austria, Italy, Netherlands). Women’s hopes and expectations regarding the positive effects of gender mainstreaming - and the potential for use of gender budgets as a tool for strengthened accountability for women - are also high.

Women in the West view EU enlargement as harbouring potential benefits in terms of increased diversity of experiences, dissemination and/or replication of good practices, new contacts and ease of coordination, sharing and comparing experiences (for example, some believe that the manner in which women in Eastern Europe were able to combine work-career and family obligations could provide new models and yield good lessons for Europe, however, some women in the East disagree with this being identified as a good practice). Hope was also expressed that EU enlargement would serve to revitalize a common European, more politicised, feminist agenda; with increased visibility and influence. Women also voice hope that women of a larger Europe would be able to mobilize more effectively around key problems such as violence against women, which are of mutual concern to them all.

## 5. Commonalities and Differences

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Women within and outside the EU believe women's NGOs, networks, and individual advocates and leaders, are on the whole still inadequately prepared for EU accession. On both sides, women recognize that with accession around the corner for 10 countries, still too few coalitions or partnerships have been forged between them to develop a common political framework for the advancement of gender equality in an enlarged Europe – one which responds to the needs and priorities of women both in West and the East of the region. Joint projects or collaborations have been sporadic and lacking in longer-term continuity.

Women's organizations in countries that are about to join the EU are hopeful that their EU membership will translate into positive change for women's human rights. Those living in countries scheduled to join later (e.g. Romania, Bulgaria) also have high expectations, as do women from neighbouring CIS with no plan to become members (Belarus, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine), who believe that enlargement of the EU will nonetheless influence improvement of gender equality in their countries. Advocates are far from naïve about the need to be vigilant and proactive in monitoring the effective implementation of gender equality commitments by their governments. In Western Europe, there is also much hope regarding the positive effects of EU enlargement (although countries of northern Europe appear to be somewhat less optimistic).

Women both within and outside the EU are concerned by the strong trend to identify the EU as an economic community rather than a community of common values. They associated problems of persisting wage gaps, occupational segregation, discrimination in access to jobs, negative impact of social reforms on women, etc. – as negative consequences of this trend. Women consulted for this paper overwhelmingly want to see an enlarged Europe that is equally concerned with harmonizing a gender-equal value system as it is with achieving a common market economy. Most women also voiced hope that a EU constitution would push the EU and national governments to strengthen their accountability to gender equality and women's human rights.

Gender equality advocates across the region share many similar concerns and interests. Many would like to see an increased focus on women's human rights and women's political and economic rights, both in EU and in accession countries. Some activists emphasized the importance of increasing women's as well as policymakers' understanding of the gender impact of macro-economic policies in Europe (including privatization, investments by multinationals, etc.) Women across the region are also equally concerned by rollbacks in social security and services (e.g. child care) as well as the challenge of balancing career ambitions and family responsibilities, and getting men to assume a more fair share of the latter.

Women's attitude towards gender mainstreaming across the West-East divide is ambivalent. In the East women are anxious about the need for Brussels to monitor enforcement of EU directives on gender equality more seriously, and they are eager to be partners to such efforts. In the West, women are concerned by the potential misuse of gender mainstreaming as an instrument, which could undermine affirmative action policies currently in place (in the East, such proactive measures to address inequalities hardly exist). For some women in the East, gender mainstreaming as a concept, raises the specter of the communist era when gender equality was enforced as a State ideology that in many respects was empty of true meaning for women's equal rights. They worry that gender mainstreaming today might similarly be applied bureaucratically while in fact paralyzing a genuine dynamic process to advance women's equal rights.

Advocates across the region strongly believe that effective implementation of gender mainstreaming cannot take place without strong involvement of women's NGOs in advocacy and monitoring of implementation, including tracking of resource allocations that are required to translate commitments into action. In Western Europe, activists see danger in the increasing approach to gender mainstreaming as a bureaucratic process, which threatens to depoliticize and dilute the feminist political agenda.

## **6. Conclusions and Recommendations**

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The enlargement of the European Union harbors tremendous opportunities for positive change for women inside and those still living outside the European Union, but also for women living in countries that will eventually border the Union. EU directives on gender equality and human rights standards have already proven powerful and effective in driving governments to take up concrete actions to improve laws and practices to address gender inequality. At the same time, women are rightly concerned that the EU, but particularly national governments, might mistakenly presume that having put in place minimal EU standards, the job is done and gender equality for women of Europe has been achieved.

In this regard some women in the East point to concerning signs that governments set to join the EU who have passed the minimum bar in preparation for accession, are now taking indirect measures to deactivate or dilute such measures. They point to the fact that some gender equality institutional mechanisms have recently been transferred to equal opportunities departments, who besides gender equality are also dealing with a host of other issues, including discrimination against minorities, the disabled, etc. In some countries, gender equality ministries have recently been demoted to departmental level, also involving cuts in resources. The opting of parliaments to adopt broad equal opportunity laws rather than gender equality laws that can more specifically target areas of gender injustice, also raise concern. Women in Western Europe, however, also bring up some similar concerns that the focus on macro-economic reforms is increasingly relegating gender equality to the bottom of the list of priorities of EU governments and EU institutions.

Some conclusions:

1. Gender equality advocates across Europe represent a critical force for advancing democratization, respect for human rights and for women's rights, in a larger Europe and beyond.
2. Women in the East and the West still know too little and display only limited interest in what's happening on the 'other side'. Many women in the West are unaware of the range of initiatives undertaken by women's NGOs and networks such as KARAT Coalition and others. In turn, women's organization in the East appear to be engrossed in their own national context, and too often are uninformed women's activism in countries of Western Europe. Such lack of awareness is likely contributing to increased suspicion and mistrust (e.g. in being represented by the EWL)
3. Women in the East require continued financial and technical support to further increase their capacity and to enable them to carry out the necessary work to advance a culture of respect for human rights and women's rights in their countries. In joining the EU, such work must focus on ensuring effective implementation and enforcement of the laws and other instruments that have been put in place to meet EU standards on gender equality. Such support should also include assistance to develop women's skills in advocacy and negotiation, support for building women's greater knowledge and confidence in working on women's economic rights, as well as encouragement for

women to recognize, appreciate, and more fully assert their leadership potential. Women in accession countries can learn from women's organizations in the West on how to mobilize sustainable support for their work at national and regional levels.

4. While women from the East consulted for this paper were all highly knowledgeable on the accession process itself, and about the European Union more generally, clearly for many grassroots activists in accession countries working at local or national level to protect women's rights, the EU still remains a remote and distant concept, which does not bear clear or direct relevance to their daily efforts. Work must continue by networks and intermediary organizations to educate women across the region on the opportunities and methods that women can utilize to leverage EU support so as to effect change on the ground – with the goal of transforming the 'EU Project' into one that is owned and shaped by women.
5. The EU enlargement process should equally be seized by Western European activists, feminists, and women in political institutions and public administration ('femocrats') to reactivate and breath new momentum within efforts to advance gender equality in Europe. Western European women should regard the EU enlargement process as an opportunity to strengthen their activism, increase joint collaboration among them and with women in the East, especially in working to protect women's rights in context of economic and social reforms, but also in other areas.
6. Women in countries that will become the new borders States in an enlarged EU must not suffer exclusion as a result of EU enlargement. Women inside the Union, and particularly women in newcomer EU countries that share a common historical political legacy, must continue to provide support to influence reforms for gender equality, and to ensure that they too can benefit from the momentum for change generated by the EU enlargement process.
7. Collective action, among women in the East remains difficult. Competition for resources, at times weak leadership, and other factors, some relating to the history of communism, still stand as obstacles for effective collective action among women. Organizations such as UNIFEM have played a constructive role in helping women in the region to overcome such challenges, through support for increased and more effective networking, as well as through facilitation of exchange at global level with other regions that has contributed to increased recognition among CEE/CIS women of the benefit in leveraging advocacy at global and regional levels to effect change for women on the ground. Such continued support is required, particularly in facilitating women of an enlarged Europe in formulating a common platform for action. Differences in women's definition of their identities or respective needs should be respected in a Europe that embraces diversity of culture and experience. At the same time, such differences must not stand in the way of women of Europe coming together as a unified force to develop a common strategy and agenda for realizing gender equality in an enlarged Europe.
8. Women hold high hopes that the EU current focus on gender equality in the field of labour policies will not overshadow women's needs in other areas.

Some recommendations that arise from the discussions and inputs, aimed at specific actors:

**EU Bodies:**

1. Women look to the EU to develop a regional strategy to effectively monitor the implementation of EU Directives in countries that are about to join the EU – one that strictly enforces the same common standards for all countries, with no 'discounts'. They call upon the EU to support the involvement of women's groups and networks in these efforts.

2. The EU should look to support and encourage efforts by international organizations such as UNIFEM as well as regional networks such as KARAT, to facilitate greater cooperation and understanding between women in accession countries but also between them and women in other parts of Europe. Such facilitation is needed to alleviate tensions and suspicions, support appreciation of diversity, and the forging of greater unity and trust among women and men in an enlarged Europe.
3. EU institutions should support and encourage European women's initiatives that target women living in CIS countries that will border the enlarged EU. Women in newcomer member States are especially well positioned to provide such support given their shared common historical legacy and experience.
4. The EU should support 'bridging interventions' that can help in ensuring that the adjustment is smooth for women's organizations that are engaged in useful work to advance women's human rights. Women from countries first in line for entry must be encouraged and supported by the EU to support those further down the line in preparing for accession, especially countries of South East Europe who are only just beginning the accession process.
5. EU gender mainstreaming policies should be regularly assessed and reviewed for their effectiveness. Gender budgeting should be utilized more regularly as a tool for monitoring and assessing the differentiated impacts of EU policies on women and men.
6. EU bodies are encouraged to establish a European institute focused on advancement of gender equality and women's rights. Such an institute should have the authority and resources to monitor the implementation of EU and Member State commitments and obligations. It should serve as a resource, drawing on the wealth of gender expertise available both in Eastern and Western Europe, and should additionally look to partner with international agencies such as UNIFEM to tap their particular experience in facilitating intra-regional and cross-regional learning and promoting innovative partnerships to advance gender equality. The establishment of such an institute, must however, not deflect from the responsibilities of EU and Governments to gender equality. On the contrary, a European gender institute should serve to bolster the work of others, ensuring quality control and effective and meaningful enforcement of gender equality directives and gender mainstreaming policies.

#### **National Governments:**

1. Women activists regard it their responsibility to monitor the effective implementation and enforcement of government commitments to gender equality. They urge governments to recognize that the measures taken to meet EU directives represent just the beginning of a longer and arduous process, which must continue. Gender equality institutional mechanism must be strengthened and better resourced to carry out their work. Gender mainstreaming policies are welcomed, but these need to be monitored for their effective application and accompanied by continued targeted initiatives to redress violations of women's rights.
2. Women are open and many are eager for increased honest dialogue and mutual collaboration between civil society and government counterparts. Efforts to promote increased NGO-government partnerships by organizations such as UNIFEM and others; should be encouraged and supported by donors and international organizations. Women's NGOs are carrying out work that is advancing valuable work to advance human rights and democratization in their countries. Such efforts deserve to be acknowledged and merit public financial support.
3. Women of an enlarged Europe should also assert their potential to contribute to the advancement of the global gender equality agenda. They must work together to ensure that the unique spectrum of experience generated by women in the larger Europe, ranging from good practices in Nordic countries, to the unique knowledge generated

in former socialist States, is shared and disseminated. Women of Europe are called upon to support other regions that are still lagging far behind, and should take responsibility in cooperation with women's movements (and/or women's activists) in the South to fight gender inequalities globally

### **International Organizations and Donors:**

1. Women in accession countries are aware, and concerned, that their entry to the EU is accompanied by an abrupt withdrawal of financial and other support – a change for which they are inadequately prepared. They emphasize the critical importance for international organizations during this critical period of change to extend their support for a longer period of time during the transition phase. Such support should be focused on the following two priorities: a) Supporting women's organization to adapt their methods of work and institutional practices, as well as building their capacities and skills in identified areas of priority (strategizing and organizational planning, partnership development, resource mobilization, strategic advocacy, etc.) b) International organizations such as UNIFEM, are positioned to play an important role as impartial facilitators in helping women to negotiate through differences and build common strategies for advancing gender equality in the larger Europe. International organizations are viewed by many women in the East as trusted partners who could assist in building bridges between various women's constituencies within and outside the EU, but also between women in civil society, governments and EU institutions.
2. In this regard, UNIFEM is encouraged to consider organizing a strategy meeting or roundtable of representatives of key regional organizations from East and Western Europe to strategize on "building partnerships for gender equality in an enlarged Europe". The meeting could draw on lessons learned and experiences of successful regional networks from other regions;
3. Many women would welcome initiative from international organizations to create a space for discussion among women leaders, advocates and experts from West and East towards development of mutual strategies and programmes. For example, a strategy meeting of representatives of key Regional Networks in East and West Europe to strategize on the theme: 'Women's Networking in an Enlarged EU' - could provide an opportunity to openly debate the representational arrangements and preferences vis-à-vis the EU, which would conform to the respective identities and interests of different entities. Facilitation by an international actor would provide an opportunity to additionally draw on relevant lessons learned, useful experiences, or expertise from other regions
4. International organizations could help different feminist streams and constituencies in what will be the larger Europe, to identify specific issue areas or landmark events that could serve as mobilizing entry points for building sustainable, effective regional partnerships (e.g. EU parliamentary elections, Convention on Europe, etc.)
5. International organizations have an important role and responsibility in continuing to support and facilitate mutual collaboration and partnership between women who will enter the EU, those that will enter in future, and those who will remain outside. Women across the region, from Western Europe and far into the CIS are experiencing common problems. Some, such as trafficking in women and, increasingly, the spread of HIV/AIDs in parts of the continent, clearly are problems that transcend national borders and can only be tackled through intra-regional partnerships between EU and non-EU countries. International organizations and donors should support efforts that support transfer of knowledge and partnership between women of the enlarged Europe with women in countries who will join the EU at some future date and those who will remain outside.

### **EU Enlargement in 2004 East-West Priorities and Perspectives from Women Inside and Outside the EU**

*Discussion Paper*  
*by Prof. Dr. Bozena Choluj and Dr. Claudia Neusuess*

#### **Summary of Comments and Feedback, May 2004**

In April 2004 UNIFEM distributed a draft of a paper authored by Dr. Bozena Choluj and Dr. Claudia Neusuess with UNIFEM support. The paper titled “*EU Enlargement in 2004: East-West Priorities and Perspectives from Women Inside and Outside the EU*” generated interesting feedback that informed its finalizing. While many of the comments and suggestions did not call for revisions, as expected many others also reflected diversity of opinion over specific points made in the paper, based on the different views and experiences of the commenting individual and/or organisation. To the extent that it was practical to do so, comments were integrated into the final version of the paper. However, some comments that called for drastic restructuring of the paper or for the development of additional chapters on new topics remained unaddressed. Nevertheless, below is a summary of all key substantive comments received that have been compiled as an Annex to the paper, providing supplementary information and different views drawn from a different sample of people.

The paper was welcomed by many as thought provoking and promoting open debate on issues of importance to women in the region. Several comments expressed the hope that the paper would generate discussion that might lead to concrete action to strengthen enforcement of EU gender equality directives. Some commentators called for additional and more detailed clarification of cited statistics. The authors acknowledge that the statistics cited are limited to a few sporadic examples. However, as the principal aim of the paper is to generate discussion rather than engage in qualified research, in the interest of keeping the paper concise, they have refrained from adding additional detailed data.

A few comments raised concern over the under-representation of views and perspectives of some groups and asked for clarity on the specific individuals and groups involved. The authors emphasize that while the range of views is by no means exhaustive, a comprehensive scan of the range of views and opinions was not feasible within the timeframe and scope of the paper. The hope is that this summary of feedback as well as ensuing discussions will broaden the debate to allow more groups and individuals to contribute their ideas.

Below is a summary of comments, which could be addressed in future papers and discussions.

#### **Perceptions from the West**

In reference to this section, one comment noted that the paper is unique in providing a western perspective, which many women in the East are often unaware of. This points to the need for increased information flow and partnerships between East and West.

#### **Perceptions from the East**

The paper makes the point that women activists in the East are concerned that they will not be viewed as equal partners upon entry of their countries to the EU. A comment emphasized in this regard that women in the East are equally concerned with exclusion in their own countries and sub-region. At the same time women in the East, due to their specific

experiences and knowledge, constitute the best resource to formulate solutions and strategies to address their specific issues as well as obstacles to their full and equal participation at national or regional levels.

For many women in the East, particularly those active at the grassroots level, the language and terms used in EU documents as well as some NGO papers is not easily accessible and further contributes to women's distancing and sense of exclusion.

### **EU funding**

Several comments expressed concern over diminishing donor funding and the difficulty in accessing EU funds. Many women's organisations experience more difficulties as compared to more established mainstream human rights organisations. Lack of funding threatens the sustainability of many women's organisations and particularly impacts grassroots organisations that encounter difficulty in mobilizing funds. A few comments expressed strong agreement over the need to strengthen funding mechanisms for women's organizations and make them more accessible to grassroots NGOs and not just the 'elite'.

Women's organisations must increase their knowledge and capacity on how to access EU funds. Increased training in ICT and communication skills can make the work of women's NGOs more efficient and strategic, particularly in the EU context.

The lack of funding for pan-European projects and actions was, and may remain, a serious obstacle to greater integration and co-operation between women's NGOs across Europe.

### **East-West Relationships**

It is important not just to increase the level and scope of cooperation and exchange between women activists in the region but also the quality of cooperation between countries.

Although women in the East share many of the same problems and concerns with those living in the West, given their social and political legacy, their solutions and approaches may differ. For example – while problems such as trafficking or sexual rights are common in EU and non-EU countries, in the East the strategies cannot be the same. In some countries there are no NGOs or other structures devoted specifically to addressing trafficking or other specific issues. The degree of social intolerance to gays and lesbians remains considerably higher in the East and, in this regard, NGOs working in the West on these issues have a considerable advantage.

The International Information Centre and Archives for the Women's Movement (IIAV) praised the report for clearly articulating the partnerships that need to be developed between women's organisations in the East and West, noting examples of their cooperation with women's organization in various countries. More information can be found at [www.iiav.nl](http://www.iiav.nl)

The European Women's Lobby (EWL) notes that the paper did not reflect its own experience. East-West division has in fact consistently diminished over the last 18-24 months and EWL has been successful in developing increasingly close working relationships with the new Member States. EWL points out that while their members over the past few years have been strongly committed to working more closely with the new Member States, collaboration has been hampered by inadequacy of EU funding mechanisms.

### **Additional comments:**

While some discussion over the hopes, fears and concerns of women in both the East and West has been initiated, a concern was raised that such dialogue has largely been limited to mainstream institutions and has not reached the grassroots level.

A number of concerns were raised on the commitment by countries to enforce EU laws. The minimum requirements for the EU in regards to gender equality and women's human rights laws will make little difference to women if accountability and enforcement are not mandatory. One commentator raised a concern that NGO and EU pressure for the implementation of gender equality legislation is in fact weakening.

Support was recommended for East-West partnerships through a mechanism of twinning women's NGOs in different countries (particularly between NGOs based in the East and West) to implement common projects. The importance of building the capacity of women's NGOs to advocate at EU level as a strategy for leveraging support for action at national level was also emphasized. Partnerships among women politicians in the West and East also could facilitate and encourage increased attention to women's issues. It is important to keep in mind the diversity of opinions and interests within Western Europe (Scandinavian countries have a very different experience than Ireland or Greece on many issues, including gender). There is also great divergence in specific topics of interest (vulnerability to poverty, increased women's political participation, etc). Cross-fertilization and exchange of ideas could strengthen participatory processes on one hand and strengthen EU action on the other.

An example of cooperation was cited between activists in Poland and Austria around an initiative to support women candidates for political office. In Germany the initiative focused on support a woman candidate for the Federal Presidency<sup>9</sup>. The initiative linked the debate in Germany on women's leadership in politics with the debate in Poland over how to support women candidates in Polish political parties, as well as the importance of getting women elected to the European Parliament. In Austria, the debate centred on various issues and questions including the question as to why Austrian women did not vote for the female right wing candidate as Federal President at the recent elections.<sup>10</sup>

In the context of EU enlargement and political discussions on the EU constitution, a comment was made on the importance of reflecting on women's perspectives and their expectations as citizens of an enlarged Europe. In this regard, a conference recently took place in Austria to discuss various concepts of European citizenship from feminist perspectives and on the background of women's experiences in different parts of Europe (see [www.ewec.net](http://www.ewec.net)).

The highly important need for sex-disaggregated data in the East was highlighted as critical for strengthening advocacy work, especially at the EU level. In this regard, countries of Western Europe are considerably more advanced in collection of sex-disaggregated statistics.

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<sup>9</sup> Prof. Gesine Schwan, President of the Viadrina University in Frankfurt/Oder

<sup>10</sup> For more details see the website of the Austrian initiative supporting the election in Germany towards the federal presidency, [http://sic.feminismus.at/johcgi/sic/TCgi.cgi?target=HOME&Param\\_IDD=36](http://sic.feminismus.at/johcgi/sic/TCgi.cgi?target=HOME&Param_IDD=36)

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