

ELWN discusses impact of EU integration on women in the new Member States

The European Liberal Women Network (ELWN) marked the opening of the European Year for Equal Opportunities by hosting a conference on the impact of EU integration for women in the new Member States on 30th January 2007 in the European Parliament.

Vesna Pusic, ELWN Chair, opened the conference by presenting the positive influence of EU integration on women's rights but stated that not everything can come from the EU. "A lot depends on citizens' initiatives, institutions cannot be expected to solve everything", she said.

Colette De Troy, Director of the Policy Action Centre on Violence against Women of the European Women's Lobby, presented the main issues for women's rights in Central and Eastern Europe (see speech). Under-representation of women in decision-making positions means women's views and specific concerns are not taken into consideration in the political arena and all areas of life. Women's situation in the labour market is also difficult due to different factors: high level of unemployment, job insecurity, significant pay gap between men and women, and lack of public infrastructure and social benefits for childcare. She stressed an insufficient action on domestic violence. There is often little or no recognition of domestic violence as a crime and not simply as a private matter.

She sees implementation of EU legislation as the main problem. "*New member states had to cope with new regulation and often change their laws, but the monitoring shows there is no machinery to implement,*" she said.

Meglana Kuneva, Commissioner for Consumer protection, gave an account of her own example as a woman in leading positions and explained the impact of the EU integration process on gender equality in Bulgaria (see speech). For a better integration of women in the labour market, she calls for incentives to be made available in the new Member States "*to encourage women entrepreneurs to seize opportunities to establish their own business or seek qualified work in the private sector*".

Norica Nicolai, Senator, PNL Vice-President, stressed domestic violence and the rise of trafficking as key problems for women in Romania. She explained that there are however a number of encouraging evolutions and trends, in particular the development of the private sector and the solid presence of women at the managerial level. "*Measures are still needed to stimulate and support the political participation of women, to ensure a greater presence of women in power and decision-making, with positive influence upon reforms designed to benefit them,*" she stated.

Katarina Golev, ELDR Vice-President, explained that EU integration has generally brought a positive change for the situation of women in the new member countries, and highlighted six main categories where this change was clearly visible in Slovakia (see speech):

- 1) European values and standards as stimuli for change
- 2) opening of the country to Europe

- 3) changing the attitude
- 4) improved economic situation
- 5) higher representation of women in politics
- 6) solving problematic and disputable issues and preventing negative development

In her concluding speech, **Annemie Neyts**, ELDR Party President, drew a parallel between the fight for disarmament and feminism, saying that she finds it “appalling that disarmament has become as unfashionable as feminism”. She explained that more people need to be mobilized to break the glass ceiling for a real gender equality to be achieved.

Annemie Neyts pleaded for structural solutions to promote gender equality rather than dependency on people’s good will. She highlighted the need for proximity in services and child, and health care to ensure that parents, and in particular women, are not discriminated against.

Pictures of the ELWN day are available here:

http://www.eldr.org/modules.php?set_albumName=album48&op=modload&name=gallery&file=index&include=view_album.php