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Report from the European Round Table in Szczecin/Poland and Recommendations for Gender Policy

Szczecin 04th of July, 2011

On 4th of July in Szczecin, Poland, took place European Round Table titled: „**Winnet 8 European Round Table East Zone – 5 steps to gender equality**”. The debate was divided into three parts. The first part focused on the idea and achievements of WINNET8 project, as well as on the possibilities of co-financing gender friendly projects. The second part introduced situation of women in the labour market, in politics, business, and rural area. The last, third, part concerned Action Plan - *5 Steps on the Path to Equality in the Region* and recommendations on how to introduce gender perspective into regional policy. After every presentation a brainstorming discussion among participants took place.

Representatives of the Quadruple Helix attended the meeting; that is university-business-government and NGOs. All participants agreed that Poland and East European Zone need to strengthen position of women in their professional lives. To maximize European competitiveness and development potential, it is essential to strive for gender equality that is, to give women the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities as men. Authorities play important role in creating environment supporting women's participation in economics, therefore the Quadruple helix is a highly recommended tool to implement changes in the labour market, especially by stimulation of involvement of all required institutions.

Detailed description of the European Round Table in Szczecin

List of participants (there were 31 of them):

- The Marshal Office of West Pomeranian Province - the managing authority for the Regional Operation Plan, Director of the Department of Social Cooperation, and the head of the Gender Equality unit at the Marshal Office – Krzysztof Faliński,



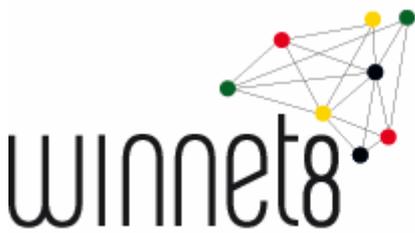
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- Regional Employment Office in Szczecin - Katarzyna Brzychcy, Agnieszka Jaworska,
- District Employment Office in Gryfice – Beata Smoleńska, Jolanta Mazurek,
- West Pomeranian Agency for Regional Development (ZARR) – Justyna Kokotowska,
- Institute of Analysis, Diagnosis and Economic Forecast (IADiPG) – prof. Józef Hozer,
- University of Szczecin – dr Marta Hozer-Koćmiel, Małgorzata Grab, Magdalena Ławicka, Anita Lichosik,
- Maritime University – Anna Difort –Dura,
- Gryfice District – Izabela Herba,
- The West Pomeranian Regional Parliament – Beata Radziszewska, Ewa Koś,
- Polish Confederation of Private Employers Lewiatan - Anna Kornacka,
- NGO - Kuruoglu Jolanta, Bogna Czałczyńska, Grażyna Merska, Alicja Mikuła,
- Regional entrepreneurs – Katarzyna Nakielska-Pawluk,
- Polish Entrepreneurs Foundation – Barbara Bartkowiak,
- ‘Women for Szczecin and the Region’ Association (KDSiR) – Anna Marczyńska.

Résumé of the conference

The fundamental information concerning WINNET8 project was presented by Anna Difort - Dura. The idea of a capitalisation project, which is WINNET8, was explained to the participants. Actions and ideas of the WRC were introduced and the important role of such centres on the way for gender equality in Europe was underlined. Speaker stressed the importance of gender equality connection with finances, therefore with economic dimensions of these activities. Ms Difort-Dura explained why it is important to promote and support the increase of women’s participation in the labour market, especially in sectors and industries



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dominated by men, and to address the occupational segregation. As one of the conclusions was mentioned an exchange of experiences in the form of transferring best practices will significantly facilitate action in this area.

The ideas of how to popularize the WRC model in the partner regions with an emphasis on entrepreneurship, innovation, information technology and communication, and unconventional employment opportunities were presented. The speaker stressed the diversity of services provided to women by the WRC, i.e. training, counselling, support of entrepreneurship, education. It was noted that depending on the extent of the effects WRC are divided into centres operating locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

The second presentation was “Perspective of equal opportunities in the EU programmes- Gender in Human Capital Operational Programme” presented by Ms Katarzyna Brzychcy, Vice-director of the Regional Labour Office in Szczecin. Ms Brzychcy presented EU policies concerning gender equality. Standard minimum was underlined in EU co-financed projects.

Main figures of statistical portrait of Polish women in the labour market were presented as well as barriers of women’s careers. Ms Katarzyna Brzychcy talked about women entrepreneurship research made by Polish Confederation of Private Employers- Lewiatan. The presentation showed that women start their business more likely to make their dreams come true and to satisfy their needs, than to use their competences and knowledge and to be more independent from their partners. Summarizing, the speaker presented the best gender projects from the region.

The next speaker, Britt-Marie Söderberg Torstensson raised up a question *Is the Gender perspective possible to implement into the next Regional Operational Programme period, or is it perhaps a dream?* The presentation concerned Winnet8 public consultation and activities that have taken place. Ms Torstensson pointed out that gender equality is only 1 of 304 pages

of 5th Report for Cohesion Policy and that the gender issues should not be attributed only to ESF but also to ERDF.

How could a stronger focus on gender equality be achieved within Europe 2020 priorities? and How could the Cohesion policy be made more results-oriented in terms of gender equality? This two question asked by Ms Torstensson were essential for the meeting as they made the participants to think over the issue very carefully. Another asked questions were *How could the Europe 2020 Strategy and cohesion policy be strengthened and more closely aligned to secure gender equality?* and *How might we strengthen opportunities for gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the work of Regional and Structural Funds?*

It has been emphasized that for Eastern Europe it is essential to secure funding for gender equality actions and to integrate gender perspective into main policy of countries. Needs to create gender specific results indicators and monitoring system as well as divide facts and figures for better policy planning were underlined. Stimulation and empowerment of an efficient network of WRCs has been claimed to be very important. Participants of the European Round Table East Zone have agreed that firstly it is the essential to educated and train decision makers and technical staff in gender equality, and secondly to link gender equality, innovation and economic growth and use the results of that connection for strengthen competitiveness of Europe.

The CEO of the Polish Entrepreneurs Foundation Dr Barbara Bartkowiak presented financial and non-financial instruments promoting entrepreneurship among women. As a representative of the institution supporting enterprise development Dr Bartkowiak shared differences between men and women in terms of business support usage. Some of the presented conclusions are listed below:

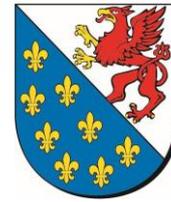
- men are more likely to seek the support than women,

- residents of small towns, then big cities and finally residents of the rural areas were asking for support
- An official start-up loan is more often used by women from big or smaller cities, by women with higher or secondary education
- Women's approach to start a business is more reliably than men's, as well as are more terminable with paying back loans than men
- Women are seeking smaller loans than men

An interesting presentation made by Ms Beata Radziszewska representing the West Pomeranian Regional Parliament concerned the situation of women involved in local government. The presented data clearly pointed out the fact that women are present in Polish politics, however, the posts concerning leading roles at the regional structures remain mostly taken by men. An important step towards a change in the field of equal opportunities on the Polish political scene is Quota Act from 5th of January, 2011. This Act was signed on 31st of January, 2011, by Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski and entered into life on 3rd of March, 2011. The Act changed the electoral regulations to the Chamber of Deputies, the European Parliament and municipal councils, as well as to regional and district councils. On electoral lists, the participation of female candidates and male candidates cannot be less than 35%. Sanction for non-gender requirement is invalidation of the list. Quota Act does not include election to the Senate and to municipal councils below 20 000 residents. It should be mentioned that the adoption of the Quota Act was the result of an active civil movement of Women's Congress. Introduction to the electoral gender quotas to electoral lists, that is guaranteeing female candidates on electoral lists with 50%, was the main postulate of the 1st Women's Congress in 2009. A citizens bill was formed (back then called parity act) that was given to the Parliament on 21st of December, 2009, together with signatures of over 150 000 Polish citizens.



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The next speaker was to Ms Bogna Czałczyńska, who presented statistics on women in the labour market. During the presentation Ms Czałczyńska often referred to the WRC discussed in the first presentation, as to an excellent tool to change the situation of women in the labour market.

After small brainstorming discussion during the coffee brake all participants were integrated and very pleased with that consultation.

DISCUSSION

In the following part of the European Round Table East Zone in Szczecin, Marta Hozer-Koćmiel presented ideas of Action Plan titled „5 Steps on the Path to Equality in the Region”. Action Plan was created for the augmentation of the quantity and quality of women’s participation in the labour market in West Pomeranian Voivodship of Poland focusing on: Innovation, ICT and Entrepreneurship. Ms Hozer-Koćmiel underlined that the importance of ICT lies in its ability to provide greater access to information and communication in women’s populations. Arguments (5 times YES!) for the thesis that the West Europe labour market needs gender mainstreaming, as well as 5 times YES! for encouraging women to take actions in the ICT sector.

Participants heard of the main effects of the proper implementation of the Action Plan as following: due to the increase of women’s participation in the labour market more women in the region will be prosperous, happy and fulfilled in the professional sphere. The region will more widely use women’s economic potential, which will result in less severe effect of the crisis. And as final thesis; higher quality of women’s functioning on the labour market will have effect on the better quality of men’s situation on this market.

M. Hozer-Koćmiel underlined that it will be important to promote the Collection of 40 Good Practices, the result of WINNET8 Project, with keeping in mind all 4 legs of the Quadruple Helix: public authorities, business, a non-profit sector – the civil society and academia.

During that part of the European Round Table took place participants' discussion. Participants firstly asked about the purpose of Winnet8 and WRC model. In the later part of the discussion participants focused on observation and comments on gender equality in Poland. The most important question and statement are written below:

- How the dominance of men reflected in the budget and the shape of social policy?
- Can men represent women “as successfully”, whether differences in experiences and priorities occur?
- Are needs and opportunities of men and women taken under consideration?
- To keep the society health, and especially women, does higher amounts of money should be spent on promoting sport among women?
- Is it possible to create in Poland a Gender budget, which is a gender sensitive budget?

- The way that women due to family reasons would not leave their jobs for a longer period is to allow short-time working or distance working.
- A study has confirmed that 89% of business women admitted that such solution is essential to them [Hewlett, Buck Luce, 2005].
- In Polish conditions, part-time employment is not very popular among employers, and in case of executive posts it is out of question.

Most of theses and recommendations match to those formulated in the Regional Round Table, mostly due to the fact that some guests took part in both Round Tables.

Documents, programmes and current strategies on any level: national, regional or local, **cannot be gender-neutral.**

Equal opportunities for men and women are conditions of providing reduction of the socio-economic disparities and creating conditions for long-term regional development. Moralization of gender equality in the economic policy cannot take place.

Equal opportunities must be included in **any economic initiative** that leads to economic growth and development of innovation and competitiveness.

Institutions dealing with gender equality should provide **clear guidance** on how this should be done in a given region, what specific actions should be taken.

Women have to stop being the **part of the largest unused human capital**.

Policy makers have to know that **gender equality** is not a cost but an investment in future growth, and Europe cannot afford to lose the economic potential of women in the development and innovation in a situation where just adopted a new strategy for rescuing the economy *Europe 2020* (thesis of E. Rumińska-Zimny.)

Changing the mindset of policy-makers at all level: local, regional, national and European and introducing more women into decision-making positions.

Larger allocation of ESF funds (up to 15%) and ERDF funds on gender mainstreaming should take place. It is a condition for economic growth and building an innovative economy. Women are a strategic part of the national human capital in all EU member states. They are the main source of labour in an aging Europe and owners of 50% of talent in the field of innovation.

Ways of involving in **bringing gender issues to the Cohesion Policy** must be defined by specific and quantified targets. Useful in this case will be usage of statistical methods thanks to which quantitative description of expected phenomenon is possible.



Encouraging women to get more involved in well paid, male-oriented industries such as **ICT**. Increasing women's activity in the ICT sector will change their lives for the better, as ICT is an agent of change. Also, because the gender imbalance in this sector is not self-regulating, therefore proactive practices are essential.

It is necessary to raise awareness of traditional societies such as the Polish, that the **labour market** in the region **needs gender mainstreaming**. This is required as it is a condition for improving the quality of economic life and human life in general – for both women and men.