

Congress Momentum14: Emancipation

Abstract of the paper for the Track #10: Emancipatory (in) Europe

European Union: a Success or a Failure in promoting women's rights in Europe?

The goal of equality between women and men and the promotion of women's rights are formally enshrined in various international conventions and commitments. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the third Millennium Development Goal (MDGs) – all reach for the same goal – women's emancipation. The development of women's rights in Europe is strongly influenced by European Union policies and law. However, most of the feminists highlight the limitations of EU in achieving equality in legal system, which is dominantly struggling to maximize the economic gains of its member states (Guerrina 2002:49). For example, women's pay as a ratio of men's has remained at about 75 per cent in the EU as a whole, segregation of labour by gender has remained a norm and discrimination against female workers is still widespread (Mazey 1998:132). Rather than stimulating the social change, the European Union creates an atmosphere of formal gender equality by implementing various policies, which not only make little change in women's emancipation in employment, but also reproduce the public-private dichotomy as well as fails to recognize women in both spheres.

In my article, I would like to analyze two types of policies, which European Union has implemented targeting the formal equality of women and reflect their limitations in ensuring substantive emancipation. Firstly, I will discuss the role the EU plays in promoting equality for men and women in labour market by analyzing the EU directives on maternity rights. I will argue, that the policies lack recognition in the arena of employment since the ideal of a worker remains the full-time employee. The EU policies fail to promote alternative sociopolitical structures, in which not only the full-time breadwinner would be considered as a valuable worker, able to fulfill the needs of the market. Such limitation of EU policies exclude pregnant women from employment as well as reproduce traditional gender roles (Guerrina 2002:62).

Gender mainstreaming has been the principle of the EU policies since the 90's. Despite being a good mean of emphasizing the problems of women in equal participation and representation, it has some severe

drawbacks, which are necessary to emphasize. Gender mainstreaming is rather 'integrational' instrument to introduce gender perspective into existing policy processes, but it does not challenge existing policy paradigms (Pollack & Hafner-Burton 2011:452). The EU, rather than rethinking it's aims from gender perspective, just integrate gender issues in already existing policies and does not play a significant role in transforming the discourse and participants of EU. In addition, it lacks a clear articulation of the relationship between gender mainstreaming and societal change (Daly 2005: 433).

In the article I will critically assess the values and aims enshrined in some of the most controversial European equal opportunity policies and reflect the limitations, which they experience in providing women's emancipation in employment. The article will aim to give some critical input for the discussion of European Europe as a institution, stimulating women's emancipation in employment in Europe.

Literature

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