



Advocacy Card

Addressing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in EC' Pre-accession Assistance to Serbia

International Gender Policy Network

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INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) has made commitments to promote gender equality and women's empowerment outside its borders. As stated in the "2006-2010 Roadmap for Equality Between Women and Men", "Gender equality is a goal in itself, a human right and contributes to reducing poverty. The EU is a key player in international development efforts and adheres to internationally recognised principles such as the Millennium Development Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA). It has reaffirmed gender equality as one of the five key principles of the development policy in the European Consensus on development."¹ Although the EU's different levels of commitment provide third countries with opportunities to address gender inequalities on their domestic soil, challenges remain to bring these commitments into effect.

Civil society organizations point at the gap between policy and practice: an overview of the European Commission's annual work, legislative programmes and policy strategy documents reveals a limited integration of gender concerns.² Furthermore, the participation of civil society organizations (CSOs) and mainly women's groups in policy discussion and formulation lacks a clear mechanism, despite the obligation of EU institutions to support a political dialogue with them.³ As an active promoter of gender equality, the International Gender Policy Network (IGPN) intends to engage in a dialogue with the Commission's Delegations in the countries of Eastern Europe, South-eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia in the matter of the upcoming revision of the country and regional strategy documents (Country Strategy Papers, Regional Strategy Papers, Multi-annual Indicative Planning Documents). The IGPN has taken the opportunity of the midterm-review and the annual review of the country/regional strategy documents to highlight the weaknesses of development cooperation and pre-accession assistance in terms of gender concerns, and to advocate for improvements.

Within the framework of this advocacy activity, the IGPN has prepared twenty two Advocacy Cards for individual countries linked with IGPN, and one common Regional Advocacy Card. The aim of this advocacy work is to remind the European and national representatives of their policy commitments. The Advocacy Card for EC pre-accession assistance to Serbia firstly provides an overview of EU's commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment. Secondly, the strategy document for Serbia is examined in the context of the EU's commitments to gender equality. Next, an assessment of gender issues in EC's assistance to Serbia is presented. Finally, recommendations are proposed to the actors involved in various degrees in the preparation of the strategy document: the EU officials, national government and civil society organizations.

¹ A Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006-2010, *European Community*, (COM 2006) 92 final, p. 9, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2006:0092:FIN:EN:PDF>

² Who decides? Gender mapping the European Union's policy and decision-making in the areas of development, external relations and trade, *WIDE*, 2007, p. 10, <http://62.149.193.10/wide/download/WHO%20DECIDES%20def.pdf?id=547>

³ For more information see Chapter 2 in Who decides? Gender mapping the European Union's policy and decision-making in the areas of development, external relations and trade, *WIDE*, 2007, <http://62.149.193.10/wide/download/WHO%20DECIDES%20def.pdf?id=547>

COMMITMENTS TO GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

- ❖ A commitment to gender equality is reflected in a number of politically and legally binding documents of the EU and EC (Treaty of Amsterdam, Maastricht Treaty, Charter for Fundamental Rights of the EU, Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women [CEDAW], Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Millennium Development Goals).
- ❖ The promotion of gender equality outside the EU is outlined as the number 6 priority area of the **2006-2010 Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men** (Commissions' Communication). This priority is further detailed as follows: 6.1 Enforcement of EU legislation in acceding, candidate and potential candidate countries and 6.2 Promotion of gender equality in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), external and development policies. The key actions taken by the Commission will include monitoring and promoting gender mainstreaming and specific measures in the ENP, EU external relations and development policies, at policy dialogue and programming levels (Regional/Country Strategy Papers and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers); at implementation level, particular attention will be devoted to gender mainstreaming in the new aid modalities (budget support and sector programmes).
- ❖ In terms of the EU development cooperation policy, the crucial policy framework for promoting gender equality is the European Consensus on Development, agreed upon in 2005 by the European Commission, the Council and the Parliament, and the representatives of the member states, where gender equality is defined as a cross-cutting issue.⁴ Furthermore, the **2007 Commission Communication on "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Cooperation"** is the first step towards a coordinated European approach to promoting gender equality and empowering women through development cooperation.⁵
- ❖ Related to the 2007 Commission Communication is the document "Conclusions of the Council of the EU and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States", also known as the **Council Conclusion**. One of the conclusions is the following: "The Council recognizes the Commission's and the Member States' specific responsibility to support developing country partners in eliminating discrimination and gender inequality by increasing visibility and accountability on gender equality and women's empowerment in development cooperation and to promote and engage in an enhanced political dialogue at all levels, including the highest political level, which incorporates gender equality explicitly as a central theme."⁶
- ❖ In line with these documents, the EU has supported a **twin-track approach: gender mainstreaming** (mainstreaming gender issues into all aspects of development policy) and **specific measures** aimed at socioeconomic and political empowerment of women.

⁴ "EU Policy Framework for Promoting Gender Equality," *European Commission*, http://ec.europa.eu/development/policies/crosscutting/genderequ_en.cfm

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Conclusions of the Council of the EU and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting with the Council on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Cooperation, *Council of the European Union*, 15 May 2007, <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/07/st09/st09561.en07.pdf>

GENDER IN THE STRATEGY DOCUMENT FOR SERBIA

Preface to the Strategy Document

The aim of the EU's overall assistance to Serbia, an EU potential candidate country, is to support the country's progress towards reaching the Copenhagen accession criteria and to prepare the country for possible future EU membership. For candidate or potential candidate countries, EC's programmes and financial assistance are formulated in the Instruments for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA).⁷ The EC's strategic planning document under the IPA is the Multi-annual Indicative Planning Document (MIPD). Another important document is the Accession Partnership (AP) with an annual report called Progress Report, which monitors and assesses achievements of the country during the year.

The strategic areas of the MIPD 2007–2009 are covered by five components: Transition Assistance and Institution Building, Cross-border Cooperation, Regional Development, Human Resources Development, and Rural Development. Gender equality is considered a horizontal issue in the strategy documents. Potential candidate countries receive assistance through components I and II of the IPA. The MIPD is issued for a three year rolling period and is reviewed on an annual basis.

Analysis of the Document from a Gender Perspective

The MIPD 2007-2009 for Serbia mentions gender equality as a cross-cutting issue: "Equal opportunities and non-discrimination will be respected as regarding gender as well as minorities and disadvantaged people, at the programming and implementation stage, particularly in relation to socio-economic support programmes" (MIPD, p. 8).

Moreover, gender issues are pointed out in relation to socio-economic requirements on p. 18: while improving access to employment and participation in the formal labour market, special attention should be given to young people, women, elderly people, vulnerable groups, etc.

Yet, even though gender equality is introduced as a cross-cutting issue in the document, there are many instances when gender questions could be further elaborated. Gender issues could be incorporated into the main priorities of component I - Transition Assistance and Institution Building, particularly in reference to rural development, education, or concerning development of policies compatible with European standards (p. 22–25).

The 2007 Progress Report highlights achievements and deficiencies in the area of gender equality. As stated in the report, "In the area of women's rights, the new constitution provides for gender equality and requires the State to ensure equal opportunities. The new Civil Servants Law prescribes equal access to public services. The parliamentary committee for gender equality has been constituted and the government council reactivated. In October 2006, Serbia submitted the Initial Report on the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Following the legislative elections, representation of women in the 250-seat parliament increased from 27 to 51. A specific law on gender equality has not yet been adopted and there are concerns over the level of violence against women and the insufficient criminal penalties. In practice, women continue to be discriminated in the labour market" (p. 13).

⁷ In January 2007, IPA replaced a series of EU programmes and financial instruments for candidate countries or potential candidate countries, namely PHARE, PHARE CBC, ISPA, SAPARD, CARDS and the financial instrument for Turkey

DIALOGUE WITH THE EC DELEGATION⁸

In August 2008, IGPB made inquiries to the EC Delegation in Serbia and to the officials in Brussels concerning the review of the strategy documents. Regarding consultations on policies and projects, the EC Delegation in Belgrade says that the next Progress Report will be issued in November 2008 and adds that Civil Society Organisations are regularly and closely consulted during the preparation of the Progress Report.

The Delegation claims that the European Commission and its Delegation in Serbia will continue to pay great attention to the issue of gender equality both through policy advice and assistance.

IGPN'S ASSESSMENT OF GENDER ISSUES IN THE EC'S ASSISTANCE

As an EU potential candidate country, Serbia has been undergoing political and socioeconomic transition in order to advance towards EU standards. In terms of gender concerns, Serbia has developed a strong foundation of women's organizations which has been, along with foreign assistance, crucial for bringing gender concerns to the national agenda. At the same time, however, many serious obstacles prevail from the continued practice of patriarchal privileges in politics, the labour market and the private sphere.⁹ Furthermore, although the EC claims a high commitment to gender equality in its assistance to Serbia, in practise, gender issues are generally overshadowed by other priorities of the transition period.

The EC's IPA is a very new instrument, and there seems to be a lack of communication between the European representatives and the women's organizations. Women's autonomous organizing in Serbia has had a comprehensive history since 1978 and the feminist platform, which included opposition to war, nationalism, racism and all kinds of discrimination and violence against women, proved as a strong tool in all the periods in Serbia and regionally. It would be important to develop a channel of communication between the EC Delegation and women's' groups for mutual profit. In a similar way, communication with the State is underdeveloped and the recently established pilot mechanism KOCID (Contact organizations of Civil Society) is at stake, as it is a part of a project. The other concerns which women's groups share with other NGOs is keeping their autonomy and the critical position of civil society.

Furthermore, the application and administration process of EU grants favours more organizations with no genuine programs than those who bring effective outcomes through their work. Finding a way of transmitting EU funds to genuine women activists' work all over Serbia should be one of the priorities, based on the merits of the platform they share and the enormous work and energy they produce. Some obstructions can be found also in the work of other foreign actors. In the years 2006 – 2007, the European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR) financed one major gender mainstreaming project through the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP). The UNDP gender program did not follow the recommendations of experienced women's groups in the planning of the project. Among the problems of the UNDP gender program were the lack of transparency and the disrespect for women's groups' expertise and achievements. In addition, the EAR delivered money for the multi-year program of the Fund for Social Innovations (FSI) which was supposed to be one of the leading supportive initiatives in the reform of the social sector. However, due to the political environment after 2003 (when the conservative government stopped the reforms), the FSI

⁸ Information in this section has been obtained through email communication of IGPB with the EC Delegation and desk officers in Brussels

⁹ Human Development Report for Serbia 2008, *UNDP*, p. 133
http://www.undp.org.rs/download/nhdr2008_eng.pdf

program became problematic since one of the demands was a partnership between civil society and institutions.

Overall, many challenges remain in the area of gender equality and women's empowerment in Serbia, despite some significant achievements. Most importantly, there is a need for the adoption of a Gender Equality Law, and for putting the existing laws on gender equality into practise. Among other shortcomings are the following: The low level of institutional gender mainstreaming (state administration, education, health, media, police, judiciary, etc.); The increasing unemployment of women and discrimination in the labour market; The serious exploitation of women's resources in the private domain and the heavy burden of reproductive work; The extremely low protection of vulnerable women (single mothers, rural women, Roma women, etc.); Increased violence against women, including displays of misogyny in the public discourse, which legitimize exclusion, exploitation and violence; Increased domestic violence and trafficking of women.¹⁰ More attention should be given to these gender concerns in the EC's pre-accession assistance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to the EU:

- To deliver on its promises to international gender agreements
- To support the development of comprehensive national policies followed by sufficient funding, based on clearly formulated indicators, effective monitoring and evaluation of the approximation and implementation of the policies and projects, in accordance to already set EU policy for gender equality and specifics of the national context
- To strengthen the EC's internal gender capacity (Gender Desks and Gender Focal Points)
- To follow the twin-track approach, and besides having gender equality as a cross-cutting issue, encourage specific projects on women in calls for proposals (to have a budget line for gender-related activities)
- To strengthen and build the capacity of women's NGOs to act as watch dogs for the implementation of gender policy
- To help ensure the financial sustainability of women's NGOs
- To increase the transparency of political dialogue with civil society in partner countries by setting the minimum standards for consultation of the local stakeholders which will be applied during the process of the development of internal policies and the national programming of IPA (6 weeks consultation, targeting NGOs with gender expertise based on established standards, etc.)
- To consider appropriate alternatives to the existing implementation of the concept of gender mainstreaming which proves to be ineffective

Recommendations to the National Government:

- To deliver on its promises to international gender agreements
- To address gender concerns on the level of policy as well as practice
- To give special attention to funds allocation to women's organizations and their initiatives aimed at addressing women's issues
- To ensure gender expertise of the national administration

¹⁰ Human Development Report for Serbia 2008, *UNDP*, p. 133
http://www.undp.org.rs/download/nhdr2008_eng.pdf

Recommendations to the CSOs

- To lobby the national government to significantly strengthen the efforts towards achieving gender equality and women's empowerment
- To build alliances with other women's organizations in order to strengthen the impact of their advocacy and lobbying activities
- To engage in an active dialogue with the EC Delegation in Serbia
- To provide shadow reports to the government reports on gender equality commitments
- To monitor gender issues in the EC's development cooperation
- To advocate for the inclusion of projects that specifically target gender issues, apart from having it as a cross-cutting issue

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