Short report about the activities of the CEE Network for Gender Issues in 2010

CEE Network was established in 1994 as a regional project, as a gender mainstreaming mechanism of the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity for systematic exchange of the best gender equality SD policies from the Nordic countries and between women activists from the SD parties in transition countries.

The project evolved through three phases:

Phase I: 1994-2001
In this phase, CEE Network organized, in close cooperation with S-Kvinnor, SIW, and Norwegian Labor Party Women, capacity building for the set up of women party organizations and general inclusion of the value of gender equality in SD party programs, introduction of the party quotas in the party statutes (1998-2001). In this phase SD parties in the transition countries little by little became shipflags of gender equality policies in their countries.

Phase II 2001 – 2007
Transfer of the best of SD EU experiences in gender equality and include them in the process of harmonisation of the national legislations of the future EU member states with the best EU standards and legislation. In this process women from SD parties, especially in CEE and SEE started to fight for better political representation of women in broader coalitions and succeeded to get enacted legal quota regulations in 7 SEE countries (BiH, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Albania). CEE Network became a formal partner of the Stability Pact for South East Europe and its Gender Task Force (199 - 2008), of the OSCE and UNIFEM. In 2007 it also became consultative member of the PES Women.

The result of this work was also, that EU enlargement did not push the share of women MEPs below 30%. At the same time SD women activists opened to civil society women human rights groups and succeeded to save some gains from the socialist times - longer and paid maternity and parental leave - in Croatia, in BiH, in Slovenia, in Serbia, in Montenegro, good public child care (Slovenia), renewed prevention of women's reproductive health (Slovenia, Macedonia) and started progressive legal reforms especially in the field of violence against women in private and working sphere (everywhere).

Phase III 2007 – 2010
In this phase CEE Network started to organize expert consultations and help in concretisation of SD policies in specific issues/areas based on the best practices of SD parties in the EU and strongly anchored in the social welfare state. In this phase CEE Network for Gender Issues was helping women activists from SD parties from non EU member states to push their parties to advocate for (when in opposition) or to implement concrete SD gender equality policies (when in power) in crucial fields such as child care, active employment policies, reproductive health and sexual rights. At the same time CEE Network became partner of the European Women's Lobby, and a member of the European Commission Network of Women in Decision Making on Politics and in Economy, It started its systematic advocacy for the establishment of broad parity coalition and for the implementation of a pan European parity campaign. As a result EWL and PES Women staged their first advocacy campaign for parity before the last EU elections in 2009 and pushed the share of women in the EU parliament from 30 to 35%.
In 16 years of its work, supported all along by S-Kvinnor and Olof Plame Centre and other SP/SDP foundations through the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, the CEE Network became global example and successful instrument for transformative politics and gender parity. It is today a recognised partner among international and regional gender equality actors such as UN ECE, UNIFEM, OSCE, Stability Pact (today Regional Council for Cooperation) and organisations like NDI.

The focus of the CEE Network for Gender Issues work in 2010 was fourfold:
- We insured that PES W advocacy campaign for the respect of women reproductive health and rights under the title of: My body, my rights, was at the same time implemented by the left wing parties in the EU accession, candidate and neighbouring countries.
- We continued our systematic work on the promotion of parity with a broad range of partners in every country where we were able to stage our own initiatives or to join efforts and offer our expertise in the actions of other actors.
- We developed special support to the Hungarian left wing women activists after the bitter defeat of the HSP at the last general elections.
- We continued our cooperation with a range of different important gender equality partners – SI, PES, FEPS, European Commission Network of Women in Political and Economic Decision Making, European Gender Equality Institute, OSCE, NDI, and many others.

Our 2010 Action plan had to be adjusted, due to the changes in the political environment:
While the PES Women initiative on the European Charter of Women Human Rights was picked up by the European Commission, the concept was diluted and very general and nonbinding document which was accepted, enumerates under priority number 3, the issue of "EQUALITY IN DECISION-MAKING" says:

"Women still do not have full access to the sharing of power and decision-making. Gender balance in decision-making, in political and economic life and in the public and private sectors, will help Europe shape more effective policies, develop a gender-aware knowledge-based society, and create a stronger and more prosperous democracy. We reaffirm our commitment to pursue the fairer representation of women and men in positions of power in public life and the economy. We will use our powers, including Union incentive measures, to promote a greater share of women in positions of responsibility. At our own level, we will commit to making all efforts in order to improve gender balance within the Commission."

This wording of the problem is far weaker than it used to be in the past. The notion of parity as a target of positive measures has disappeared.

In this new context, PES Women decided to insist on the Socialist Women Human Rights' Charter, and CEE Network succeeded to include the following wording on this issue in this PES W crucial document:

"Equal representation and economic independence

Ensure equal political representation of women and men in all decision-making bodies at all levels of governance. Introduce quotas in the political sphere as well as in managerial boards, based on the Norwegian model, in order to enhance overall women’s representation, participation in leadership
bodies, influencing policy-making and improve women’s socio-economic independence. Parity should be an obligatory/mandatory part of the European Commission composition process, based on the Belgian Senate proposal."

For the rest, the work on parity was developed as planned.

The second deviation was the focus of the CEE Network Office in Budapest on the support to the Hungarian Socialist Party women activists in their efforts to oppose to the conservative attacks on women reproductive rights and during their preparations for the local elections after the terrible defeat of our sister party in Hungary on the national elections.

The third deviation is in the postponement of the Strategy renewal discussion to February 2011, in New York, due to the extreme workload of all Board members in their professional jobs in 2010.

My body my rights SD women advocacy campaign:
SD Policies on women sexual and reproductive rights and health - research and defining priorities of non EU members states SD parties, based on specific questionnaire, regional seminar East on women reproductive health and rights in Skopje, regional evaluation seminar in Warsaw/Participation at the PESW CEE Network joint seminar "My Body My Rights"

Advocacy for parity

Parity advocacy in Poland
Public hearing on request for parity in electoral legislation in Polish Sejm - in cooperation with Congress of Polish Women

Parity advocacy in Ukraine
Coalition for Parity in Ukraine - joint project with Institute for Democracy and Social Processes, LP Westminster Foundation, Alfred Moser Foundation and FES

Parity advocacy in Czech Republic
Seminar on positive measures in electoral legislation in the framework of "Chicken campaign" of the Forum 50% in Czech Republic

Parity advocacy in Slovenia
Advocacy for the use of the "zipper" in the first half of all parliamentary party lists in local elections in Slovenia - joint project with Women's Lobby of Slovenia and Governmental Office for Equal Opportunities

Parity advocacy in Croatia
International seminar at the occasion of 15 years of the Women's Forum of the SDP of Croatia

Advocacy for stronger legal quota in Turkey
International seminar on empowerment of women, in cooperation with Womenest and the government of Turkey and the Mayor of the city of Istanbul

Parity advocacy within gender mainstreaming programs of SD parties in the Balkans
Regional seminar of SD women in SEE in cooperation with NDI Serbia and Olof Plame Centre regional mission in Belgrade
Advocacy for broad women coalition and parity rules in the party statutes in Cyprus

Women Can Do It II seminar in Cyprus

Advocacy for improvement of legal quota in Albania

2 Seminars on gender stereotypes (June 2010) and needed improvement for legal quota in Albania (November 2010), in cooperation with UN ONE and OSCE presence in Albania

Advocacy for broad quota coalition in Moldova

Seminar and consultations with governmental body for gender equality on political empowerment of women in Moldova, in cooperation with OSCE Moldova

Activities in support of left wing women in Hungary

Conference on “The situation and prospects of Gender Equality of Hungary and Europe 18th November 2010”
Budapest Office of the CEE Network in cooperation with Zita Gurmai (PESW)
Five seminars to support left wing women activists in Hungary, during electoral campaign for local elections (middle of 2010)
The seminars were designed to support and encourage women activists from the left parties to address the complex political, economic and social issues arising from the victory of the right wing parties.
“Tuning brochure” on Gender Equality in Brussels; Publication with case studies on how to handle different gender policies in recent conditions (made by researchers)
Arborus Project, French initiative (political /SP/, civil and business partnership project supported by EC aiming at active employment policies for women)
"Women and the society" forum;
"How do the women elect? - Women elector behaviour from a comparative European point of view"

May 2010
The conference organized by FES Budapest, S&D Group of the EP and PESW. It was a fringe meeting of the annual external group meeting of the S&D Political Group. More than 100 women from Hungary were participated.
"Towards Strengthening the External Dimension and the Partnership in Action against Trafficking in Human Beings in the post-EU Lisbon Treaty Era”
Round working table discussion; Brussels; 23rd June
The round table tried to analyse the present status how the Lisbon Treaty effects this field. The trio Presidency, Sweden, Dutch examples and experiences were discussed and the agenda for 2011 was defined. On behalf of CEE Network Zita Gurmai informed the participants of the panel about the situation in Hungary and the neighbouring countries

Meetings of Board members for the coordination of the project were held throughout the year 2011 in New York, Ljubljana, Zagreb, Brussels, Warsaw and full fledged Board meeting in Budapest, in January 2011

Our activities implemented in 2011 were done in cooperation between CEE Network Ljubljana, Budapest and Tallinn Offices.
Implementing our different activities in 2010, we succeeded to get in personal contact with close to 5000 left wing women human rights activist from all over Europe, from Turkey and in several CIS countries.

Lessons learnt:
Be a part of the mainstream SD effort for transformative politics. Form your strategy in a democratic process but make it happen in an organized process with clear rules. Build long term partnerships on common values, work on specific issues with all stakeholders! Regional cooperation and exchange of experience is crucial: it is inspiring and cost effective. Invest as much as you can in the public visibility and documentation of your work. Dare to give and dare to take.