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FINANCING FOR GENDER EQUALITY
AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN
IN EASTERN EUROPE

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** The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.*

Introduction

This paper focuses on the assessing the impact of a decrease in financing for women human rights NGOs in Eastern Europe caused by the withdrawal of donors from the region, and also geopolitical changes related to the EU enlargement in 2004. It is based on the experience of women human rights NGOs as well as Eastern European women's network. Finally, based on the analysis, it proposes the recommendations for future action.

How are women's organizations funded and what are the trends in such funding?

A boom in funding by foreign large private and public donors in the nineties in Eastern Europe lasted only for a decade. It was a new region for them after the collapse of a totalitarian regime, and contributing to building NGOs including women's human rights organizations was an evident priority. A sharp withdraw of donors at the beginning of the new century caused an alarming decline in the funding of women's organizations¹. It was a devastating depart that created a serious financial insecurity, and many of women's NGOs were forced to reduce significantly their staff and activities, limit their office space or even close down their organizations. The consequences are even more disastrous since many organizations were relatively young (less than ten years) - being in the stage of promising process of institutional development of their organization - and reducing an experienced staff caused a significantly diminished capacity in fundraising, and, as consequence, their perspective of survival.

A fast withdraw of donors from the middle income countries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union created a real threat for young civil society and women's human rights groups which were ill prepared to face new situation with no alternative sources of funding at the country level. Moreover, it affected badly low income Eastern European countries (e.g. Moldova), and they are again somehow forgotten and not included in

which generally makes an impression of Poland being “an anti-feminist state”⁴ . Other challenges arise from some donors’ approach - a stereotyped image of Eastern European and

had also a negative impact on the condition of women's NGOs and financing for women human rights⁶. Since 2003-04 financial situation of women's NGOs has dramatically worsened. It was, among other trends, due to the assumption of international donors (who came to Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin wall with their 'democratization' agenda) that democratic mechanisms are already in place and guaranteed by EU membership of these

What are the challenges?

Although equality between men and women is included as a principle in the Treaty establishing European Community and should be incorporated in all activities, gender equality gradually disappears from the new EU policy papers and financial instruments for 2007-13. Replacing gender equality⁷ with equal opportunities with no emphasis put on gender is a serious threat for women's empowerment. Equal opportunities is too broad term and poses a risk that women's equal opportunities may become marginalized and/or lost completely, as was in case of celebration of the year 2007 as a European Year of Equal Opportunities for All in some of the NMS: gender equality programs were not a priority and received little support from the governing bodies. Another serious concern is the question of gender mainstreaming (see above), and the general notion of "equality" that includes many other forms of discrimination beside gender. This may lead to gender inequalities not being adequately addressed.

Proposals for policy-makers on increasing resources for the women's movement.

Since awareness on gender equality and women's empowerment is more advanced principally among the EU officials, the European Commission should put a "pressure" on NMS governments to increase financial resources for gender equality and women's empowerment in programs financed by the European Structural Funds. Moreover, there should be a requirement of certain percentage to be allocated to women's NGOs.

The

- (a) Fill a funding gap in financing gender equality and women's empowerment programs.
- (b) Introduce women's empowerment and gender equality as a separate thematic area of funding.
- (c) Support institutional and human resources development, and democratic governance of women's NGOs
- (d) Promote funding for 'watch dog' women human rights NGOs, for their monitoring of financing for gender equality and democratic lobbying activities.

2. By the Governments within European Structural Funds

- (a) Monitor mainstreaming of gender perspective in the projects financed by Structural Funds.
- (b) Give more consideration to the proven expertise in gender equality issues in the organizations implementing projects on gender equality.
- (c) Reduce and simplify detailed technical administrative requirements in the application for and implementation of structurally funded projects.
- (d) Build capacity of operating personnel of European Structural Funds responsible for financial and administrative verification of implemented projects.

3. By the Governments within the Norwegian and European Economic Area (EEA) Financial Mechanisms