

Croatia: ‘Who will represent women’s interests in the EU?’

Centre for Women's Studies, member of Women’s Network Croatia, organized on April 9 one-day conferences entitled 'Who will represent women's interests in the EU? ‘ The aim of the conference was to gather the representatives of political parties, civil society and the academia in order to present their views on gender equality policies in Croatian society in the framework of the EU. The speakers were Nadežda Čačinović (Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences), Snježana Vasiljević (Faculty of Law), Tajana Broz (CESI), Renata Jambrešić Kirin (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research), Rada Borić and Marina Orešić (Centre for Women’s Studies). The conference panellists were also Toni Vidan, a candidate on the list of Green Action, and Melita Mulić, a candidate on the list of SDP-HNS-HSU in the European elections.

Nadežda Čačinović pointed out that the European Parliament elections are taking place in the time of crisis and that it is, taking into consideration the very title of the conference, important to emphasize the connection between the struggle for parity in electoral lists and preserving the European ideal of the social state. Toni Vidan stressed that this type of advocacy work, whether on environmental or women’s issues will be deprived of support mechanisms in the country after the accession, as it was the case with other member countries. He also added that the crisis is not only economical, but also resource and environmental, which shouldn’t be an argument for undermining human rights. Melita Mulić commented on the voting rules in the elections for the European Parliament, pointing out that preferential voting is not favourable toward women. She expressed a wish that gender equality issues stop being ghettoized and that men also become involved in them, that, if necessary, such participation be normatively regulated, and thereby stop relying solely on the parties’ democratic potentials. Rada Borić, the Centre’s executive director and vice president of the European Women’s Lobby presented EWL’s structure and work and especially the Lobby’s work on various *position papers* whose aim was to influence different areas of political and social life in Europe. She also announced that this year’s annual conference will take place in Zagreb, from May 31 to June 2. Tajana Broz presented the results of the work of the election advocacy network Women’s Platform 2011, where through focus groups women expressed their expectations from the future government, including social justice and equal opportunity issues, and, above all, that the established regulations and mechanisms truly be applied and functioning. Despite the ingrained practice that non-parliamentary parties nominate more women than parliamentary



ones, in the 2011 elections the situation was reverse – women made up only 18% of heads of electoral lists, a only a third of them were located above the sixth place in the list, the position likely to win seats in the parliament. Snježana Vasiljević pointed out that it has been 10 years since the passing of the first Gender Equality Act, and the situation has improved, but was unfortunately stagnating. She also said that it was troublesome that only now, right before the accession, jurists are being educated about the issue of the implementation of European Law and that, in that sense, a real panic has set in. The implementation of EU's legal *acquis* does not imply its mere formal application, but also its interpretation, which falls under the jurisdiction of courts. Despite the fact that there has been a course on European Law at the Faculty of Law since 2005, the omission is evident in the non-existence of anti-discriminatory and human rights courses. She finds the lack of intersectionality in our laws and institutions particularly problematic, which raises the question of jurisdiction in resolving individual cases.

In an interesting discussion that followed, Violeta Stanišić, Head of the European Parliament Information Office in Croatia, pointed out that gender equality was one of the European Parliament's key values. Still, there are only 23% of women in leadership positions despite the fact that women make up 70% of parliament employees.

The conference was part of the final activities of the project *Ad Acte - Anti-Discrimination Actions Towards Actions of Women and Men* supported by European Union.