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**ЖІНКИ В ПОЛІТИЦІ:  
міжнародний досвід для України**

**WOMEN AND POLITICS IN UKRAINE:  
Benefiting from International Experience**

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## **UKRAINE – WEST DIALOGUE IN GENDER ASPECT: REVIEW OF DISCOURSE ON SEMINAR ABOUT WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS**

### **Annotation**

From the topic of seminar «Women and Politics in Ukraine – Benefiting from International Experience» it is obvious that foreign colleagues who are experts in gender politics will share their successful experience of gender politics implementation. Moreover, it is also the experience of so called Northern (Scandinavian) countries in Europe that are famous of one of the best gender situation in the whole world. Seminar consisted from four parts, i.e. welcome speeches of representatives of Ukrainian government services, speeches of guests and researchers from abroad, from Kyiv, and regions of Ukraine. That is why we should emphasize three main discourse areas that appeared around the topic of gender politics. First of them (the most general) is connected with gender situation in Ukraine and in the West, second one shows the gender situation in the capital of Ukraine and in the regions, and third one is based on the cooperation of government services with non-government sector – women’s NGOs.

### **Western Experience and Ukrainian Realities**

On the first plenary session «International Experience of Women’s Political Participation» researchers from Norway and representatives of international organizations in Ukraine (OSCE, UNDP) that implement gender equality in our country made a speech. First questions were connected with using of Western experience in gender transformation on the basis of Ukrainian realities. Svitlana Oksamytna (Department of Sociology, Head, National University of «Kyiv-Mohyla Academy») asked about the difference between

Parliaments where deputies are mostly men (like in Ukraine) and Parliaments where there are 40% of women.

Colleagues from Norway are supposed to answer. Solveig Bergman (Nordic Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Research, Oslo) noticed that these issues have been analyzed in the book «Equal Democracies? Gender and Politics in the Nordic Countries»<sup>1</sup> that Ms. Solveig presented to NaUKMA Department of Sociology. In general, Solveig Bergman named three main characteristics of Parliaments with high percentage of women:

1) special political atmosphere (when critical mass of women is created they become more confident and can work strategically);

2) questions about family legislation have been raised (legislation of gender equality);

3) violence against women, sexual rights, and abortion rights – these questions appeared on the political agenda only after women came in Parliament.

Other Norwegian researcher Elisabet Rogh (Centre for Women's Studies and Gender Research, Oslo University) appealed to the example with Norway. She told that when minorities came on the certain level the whole communication changed. Besides, we can speak about the economic development of the country both in the center and at the periphery that supports the idea of improvement the whole gender situation. Elisabet Rogh also told about some new tendencies, i.e. women began their own business. So, they became active not only in politics but also in economics.

### **Women's NGOs and Possibilities of Influence on Government Services**

Representatives of Ukrainian NGOs (such as «League of Professional Women», «League of Women-Voters 50/50», Eastern Ukrainian Centre «Women's Perspectives», «Men against Violence», and so on) also participated in seminar.

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<sup>1</sup> Christina Bergqvist et al. (eds.) Equal Democracies? Gender and Politics in the Nordic Countries, Scandinavian University Press, Oslo, 1999.

They were interested how NGOs could influence on government services in order to improve the gender situation in Ukraine. The President of «League of Professional Women» Olena Lazorenko inquired persons from International organization in Ukraine about mechanisms and practices that can be used by NGOs for increasing the number of women in politics.

Marten Ehnberg (Elections and Governance Project Manager, the OSCE Project Coordinator in Ukraine) appealed to the practical work of OSCE in Ukrainian regions. They started national seminars for political parties to increase women's participation before elections. In this example it was the initiative from Kirovograd. So, Mr. Ehnberg noticed that OSCE is the organization that reacts upon different initiatives from the Ukrainian side. He also added that high representation of women in politics is the aspect connected with democratic and economic development of the country. Very soon the political parties will understand that they will have political dividends from the high percentage of women in party lists.

Larysa Kobelyanska (UNDP Ukraine, Head of the Equal Opportunities Programme) formulated the possibilities and advantages of NGOs clearly and practically. First of all, Ms. Larysa paid large attention to intra- and inter-party dialogue. NGOs should initiate this kind of dialogue gathering parties on the round table to discuss different problems (connected for example with women's rights) and the ways the parties are supposed to solve them. The second mechanism is qualified analysis of gender situation in Ukraine. Thirdly, NGOs should use mechanisms of legislative influence that the law gives. Ms. Kobelyanska used such example. There are data about cases of sexual harassment in Ukraine but on the other hand there is no court examination. That is why we may suppose that NGOs don't act efficiently. And finally, as Larysa Kobelyanska said we should not forget about activity on the regional level. Women's NGOs that have their representatives on the regional level have more chances to participate in political life of Ukraine.

### **Implementing of Gender Equality: Activity on the Regional Level**

On the seminar there were a lot of participants from different regions of Ukraine (Vinnytsya, Zaporizhzhya, Lviv, and so on) that demonstrated the importance of this issue also at the periphery.

For instance, Larysa Polulyakh from Vinnytsya («Progressive Women») told that the questions of women's participation in politics are being solved by concrete actions. NGOs' activists started to fight with women's poverty, to develop women's business, to organize different trainings for women.

What about Vinnytsya, Ms. Larysa Kobelyanska drew attention to the fact that it was the first city in Ukraine where men actively supported gender movement. And first men's organization «Men against Violence» work there to prevent violence against both men and women. The Head of NGO «Men against Violence» Volodymyr Kozlov described briefly the activity of organization. He raised the question of gender sensitivity: What should men do in order to help women? According to his opinion, any homogeneous men's group is more aggressive and cruel, less democratic than the same group with at least one woman. And most men dislike such type of behavior. According to the experience with his NOG, Volodymyr Kozlov said that a lot of men are eager to cooperate with women's NGOs. He concluded that both genders ought to unite their forces to achieve success.

### **Lobbying Possibilities of Women's Interests**

In the discourse field «government services versus NGOs» appeared the issue of lobbying of women's interests. Olesya Sungurova (Vice-director of the Regional State Administration, Zaporizhzhya) asked Sergiy Plotyan (Chief Consulter of the Committee of Verkhovna Rada in the Questions of European Integration, Kyiv) about the real possibilities of women in the Parliament being lobbied by men.

First of all, Sergiy Plotyan described the gender situation in Ukrainian Parliament. 2004 year was «gender» year for

Verkhovna Rada. Nevertheless, there were a number of seminars, some books were published, and still Ukrainian society is not ready to perceive gender issues. Talking about lobbying, women should look for some groups of deputies that could support them in promoting interests. This is the European way of civilized lobbying. According to Sergiy Plotyan, UNDP demonstrated the experience of qualitative lobbying.

### **Equality between Men and Women or What is Gender?**

The Head of the Mater Program in Political Sciences, NaUKMA Sergiy Kiselov provoked other discussion by his question «What is gender?» The point is that speakers were talking about equality between sexes but named only women. Mr. Kiselov reminded that there is more than one gender and we should not forget about this.

Larysa Kobylyanska appealed to so called «historical justice.» She gave the example with Swedish Parliament where gender issues were discussing. Mostly women were speaking about different issues. And then men said that such as the main topic is gender equality they also would like to participate in these debates. One women-deputy got up and said, «During 150 year you had so large minority in our Parliament that you could solve a lot of problems and don't hear women's voices. Now we have the right to talk and you should listen to us». Larysa Kobylyanska concluded that there are issues that in some situations may be lobbied by only one gender. And there are questions where the women are most infringed.

Tamara Melnyk (Advisor of Minister of Ukraine for Family, Children and Youth) put the question in more radical way, «Ukraine is under danger. Democracy is being killed. Lack of gender approach.» We need a number of analytical researches such as most professors can't identify the problem at all.

Sergiy Plotyan demonstrated some good examples of gender equality. It is the famous case of gender discrimination on the state level in UK called «David Willis v. UK.» European Court of Human Rights supported the gender

equality principal and forced UK changed the discrimination law about widow's benefits.

### **Gender Aspect of Corruption in Ukraine**

Denys Pyatygorets, Assistant of the OSCE Project Coordinator in Ukraine in Zaporizhzhya oblast proposed to prove empirically the higher level of Ukrainian women's morality. So, the other topic of discussion was about the comparison of corruption level between men and women. As Mr. Denys Pyatygorets told, in Zaporizhzhya oblast there is no scandal connected with women in politics. On the other hand, we can assume that this is because there are only few women involved in government services.

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The whole discussion was concluded by Sergiy Kiselow that initiated debates about definition of gender. He just said, «I believe that we should strive for the situation where both men and women could represent the humanity.»

As speeches and debates showed, Ukrainian researchers, activists, and state employees have a lot of work to do in order to approach to the Western gender situation where the level of women's participation in politics is much higher. First of all, different aspects of society's attitude to gender issues should be studied and researched in detail. Then we should try to change public opinion towards gender situation. Of course, sometimes there will be the need to play «men's games» with strict rules. But it is the long step-by-step way and we should go ahead bravely.