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Gender Politics in the Expanding European Union: Mobilization, Inclusion, Exclusion

Silke Roth editor, Berghahn Books, New York, Oxford, 2008, 272 pp., ISBN 978-1-84545-516-3 Hb ; £42.95 .

Gender politics in the European Union (EU) occur as interactive and non-linear processes that undergo constant negotiation, and renegotiation, at national and supranational levels. The sequential accession of new states to the EU's structure has contributed to the geographic proliferation of gender equality legislation to new regions of Europe and to the broadening of the scope of gender equality regulations to incorporate problems such as family-work relations and sexual harassment in the work place. Nevertheless, the impact of the EU's gender politics differs according to the member state and also to the policy area. These differences are the outcome of many intersecting factors such as diversity in historical political and economic systems, gender employment regimes and international pressure to adhere to gender equality requirements in the pre-accession period. Amidst this variation, the EU provides important tools for domestic and transnational activists to demand member state compliance with existing gender equality standards and to work towards building feminist networking and cooperation to strengthen claims for gender equality.

This volume, edited by Silke Roth, approaches the subject of gender politics in the expanding EU through the processes of feminist mobilization for gender equality. The collection does not present a glorified story of the European Union's feminist cooperation but critically assesses the opportunities and challenges, successes and failures, of feminist networking in the processes of the EU's enlargement. Gender policy and laws are discussed from the perspectives of transnational and national women activists involved in framing, creating, and implementing equality laws.

Articles in this collection broadly illustrate that "the interaction between the EU and its member states is interactive and dynamic" (p.2) and the process of policy making and its implementation involves many stakeholders; from governmental to non-governmental, in addition to diverse institutions at national and transnational levels. Contributions in this collection demonstrate comprehensive multi-dimensional and multi-layered analyses of the impacts of the EU enlargement on gender politics in member states, as well as on the collective level of the European Union. They emphasize the myriad intersecting processes and activities that have accompanied the EU's processes of enlargement including political and economic transformations of post-communist states, tensions within transnational women's cooperation and networking, and processes of negotiation between grassroots activists and state authorities in implementation legal equality frameworks. As the authors in the volume argue, the EU shapes domestic politics of member and candidate states while, at the same time, it is shaped by them. Likewise, top-down processes, in relation to the actors, are interactive and dynamic: when women's movements influence a state or an EU policy, concurrently those institutions shape these movements.

The impact of the expanding EU on gender politics is neither uni-dimensional nor linear. Articles in this volume demonstrate that the EU enlargement is a contradictory process that carries at the same time positive and negative consequences for women. The neoliberal direction of economic transformation enforced by EU requirements meant that women in candidate post-communist countries experienced a decline in their employment and public sphere participation. This decline was concurrent with the EU's engagement that contributed to the implementation of gender equality laws that provided tools for combating many forms of gender discrimination, such as sexual harassment.

Tensions and contradictions are not only limited to the processes of the EU expansion or system transition, mentioned above, but also characterize domestic and transnational women's mobilizations and feminist cooperation across Europe. The volume not only problematizes the relationship between activists from Western and Eastern states, but concurrently illuminates the tensions that women's movements face domestically, for example in the representation of ethnic minority interests. The writers successfully deconstruct the notion of the supremacy of western standards of gender policy by

presenting the spectrum of economic rights (such as favourable access to employment), and social rights (such as childcare), that women from communist countries had under previous regimes and which were taken away with the implementation of neoliberal systems.

The book is organised in three parts, which subsequently present the role of the EU in broadening gender equality policy (part I), case studies of feminist mobilization in old and new members of the EU (part II), and the limitations of the EU's equality policies with respect to gender, ethnicity, and candidates' adherence in the pre-membership period to gender equality legislation (part III). The structure of this collection is clear and reflects the depth and complexity of the approaches presented. The editor has organized it in a way that shows the emergence and proliferation of gender politics over time, geographical space, and fields of regulation. The volume opens with articles that review processes of the emergence and broadening of the EU's gender equality legislation (equal pay and work-family policy) and their implications for new member states. The following chapters introduce the reader to six case studies presenting women's movements and gender equality policies in Ireland, Spain, Germany, Poland, Czech Republic, and Hungary, with emphasis on challenges to the implementation of the EU's standards of gender equality. The volume ends with a discussion that contextualizes the limitations of the EU's gender equality policy to evaluate fairly the policy adherence of candidate states (eg. Turkey), and to accept minority claims for equal protection and representation (eg. Sweden).

Gender politics in the Expanding European Union: Mobilization, Inclusion, Exclusion is a unique piece of scholarly work. It combines a theoretically innovative analysis of feminist mobilization and gender policy with a diversity of academic voices represented by scholars from established, more recent, and future EU member states. The book is also pioneering in the way that it brings the experiences of women's movements in both post-communist and western member states together. However, some differences in methodological and analytical frameworks employed in the case study section may leave the reader unable to effectively track similarities or differences in the processes of feminist mobilizations and in the application of gender politics frameworks. The book is a valuable source of information and inspiration for activists, scholars, and laypeople interested in learning about feminist social mobilization and collaboration in the context of the EU's enlargement. In addition, this volume establishes a solid foundation for further investigation of topics related to the EU's gender politics, including these exploring women's experiences of changes in gender relations and/or micro-level processes involved in the implementation of gender equality policies in member and candidate countries.