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Lilija Kublickienė, Alina Žvinklienė

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF GENDER EQUALITY POLITICS AND CURRENT GENDER GAPS IN THE BALTIC STATES¹

The common reference to the Baltic States as a single geopolitical entity conceals the actual differences between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The article aims to outline the principal similarities and differences between Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the field of gender equality politics developed within gender mainstreaming approach in attempt to better understanding of the current gender gaps in these countries. The research focuses on how national gender equality machineries were (re)constructed in accordance with international commitments to the UN and the EU after the restoration of independence in the Baltic States. It is demonstrated that differences between the Baltic States in the institutionalization of the contemporary structure of gender equality machinery were overcome once they became EU members. The current outcomes of gender equality politics are described on the basis of the Global Gender Gap Report 2017. The empirical data are provided for three Baltic States by analysing their gender gaps in four spheres – Economic participation and opportunity, Education attainment, Political empowerment and Health and survival. According to the Global Gender Gap Index, the Baltic States are among the EU Member States with the average / slightly above-average gender equality. The article argues that confirmation of the institutionalization of the contemporary gender equality machinery, the content of national governmental activities and the predominant relationship model with civil society in the Baltic States indicate that gender mainstreaming is likely yet another and the most recent social policy tool for the management of human resources. Thus, Latvia usually demonstrates a minimal attachment to gender mainstreaming. Moreover, Latvia has regressed somewhat in this respect in 2013. However, current Latvia can be considered as having more equality than Lithuania and Estonia. Among all countries participated in the research in 2017, Latvia ranks 10th, Lithuania, accordingly, 12th, and Estonia, accordingly, 16th. The case of Latvia levering the rank up due to positive trends in closing gender gaps in both Economic Participation and Opportunity and Political Empowerment subindexes confirms an assumption that rather social changes related to national demographical and economic development than merely technocratic sophistication of gender equality politics has a profound impact on current statistical indexes related to gender equality.

Key words: gender equality, gender mainstreaming, gender equality machinery, gender gap.

Genera vienlīdzības institucionalizācija un mūsdienu sieviešu un vīriešu vienlīdzības stāvoklis Baltijas valstīs

Kopējā atsauce uz Baltijas valstīm, kā vienotu ģeopolitisku vienību, slēpj faktiskās atšķirības starp Igauniju, Latviju un Lietuvu. Raksta mērķis ir izklāstīt galvenās kopīgās un atšķirīgās iezīmes starp Igauniju, Latviju un Lietuvu dzimumu līdztiesības politikas jomā, kas izstrādāta dzimumu līdztiesības aspekta pieejas ietvaros, lai labāk izprastu pašreizējās dzimumu atšķirības šajās valstīs. Galvenā uzmanība pētījumā tiek pievērsta tam, kā izmainījās valsts dzimumu līdztiesības mehānismi Baltijas valstīs saskaņā ar starptautiskajām saistībām pret ANO un ES pēc neatkarības atgūšanas. Ir pierādīts, ka atšķirības starp Baltijas valstīm dzimumu līdztiesības mehānismu mūsdienu struktūras institucionalizācijā tika pārvarētas, kad tās kļuva par ES

dalībvalstīm. Pašreizējie dzimumu līdztiesības politikas rezultāti ir aprakstīti, pamatojoties uz “Globālo ziņojumu par dzimumu līdztiesības problēmu 2017. gadā”. Empīriskie dati tiek sniegti trim Baltijas valstīm, analizējot to atšķirības starp dzimumiem četrās jomās – ekonomiskā līdzdalība un iespējas, izglītība, politiskā ietekme, veselība un izdzīvošana. Saskaņā ar Global Gender Gap Index, Baltijas valstis dzimumu līdztiesības jomā atbilst vidējam līmenim starp ES dalībvalstīm. Balstoties uz rezultātu analīzi, var pieņemt, ka mūsdienu dzimumu līdztiesības mehānisma institucionalizēšanas apstiprināšana, nacionālo valsts programmu saturs un dominējošais attiecību modelis ar pilsonisko sabiedrību Baltijas valstīs liecina, ka dzimuma līdztiesības problemātikas uzskaitē visdrīzāk ir viens no sociālās politikas instrumentiem cilvēkresursu vadībā. Latvija parasti parāda minimālu uzmanību dzimumu problemātikas uzskaites institūtu attīstībā, turklāt 2013. gadā pat tika novērots regress šajā jomā. Tomēr 2017. gada rādītāji parāda, ka Latviju var uzskatīt par vienlīdzīgāku nekā Lietuvu un Igauniju. Starp visām valstīm, kas piedalījās pētījumā 2017. gadā, Latvija ieņem 10. vietu, attiecīgi Lietuva 12. un Igaunija – 16. vietu. Latvijas reitings paaugstinājās sakarā ar pozitīvām tendencēm dzimumu atšķirību novēršanā gan ekonomiskās līdzdalības un iespēju, gan politisko tiesību palielināšanas apakšindeksos, kas apstiprina pieņēmumu, ka sociālas izmaiņas, kas saistītas ar nacionālo, demogrāfisko un ekonomisko attīstību, nozīmīgāk ietekmē ar dzimuma līdztiesību saistītos statistikas rādītājus, nekā vienkārši tehnikas dzimumu līdztiesības politikas pilnveidošana.

Atslēgas vārdi: gendera vienlīdzība, gendera problemātikas novērtējums, gendera vienlīdzības mehānismi, gendera pārrāvums.

Институционализация гендерного равенства и современное состояние равенства мужчин и женщин в странах Балтии

Объединение Эстонии, Латвии и Литвы в единый геополитический субъект: страны Балтии, как правило, скрывает фактические различия между ними. В целях лучшего понимания гендерных разрывов в Эстонии, Латвии и Литве, в статье обсуждаются основные сходства и различия в национальной политике гендерного равенства этих стран, которая разработана в рамках общего подхода к учету гендерной проблематики. Основное внимание исследования направлено на процесс создания национальных механизмов гендерного равенства в соответствии с международными обязательствами перед ООН и ЕС после восстановления независимости в Эстонии, Латвии и Литве. В статье показано, что в контексте вступления в ЕС, страны Балтии выразили различный уровень энтузиазма по поводу (вос)создания национальных механизмов обеспечения гендерного равенства. Однако различия между Эстонией, Латвией и Литвой в институционализации современной структуры механизмов, обеспечивающих гендерное равенство были преодолены вскоре после того, как они стали членами ЕС. Текущие результаты политики в области гендерного равенства описаны на основе показателей «Глобального доклада о гендерном разрыве – 2017». Согласно обобщенному индексу *гендерного разрыва*, равенство между женщинами и мужчинами в странах Балтии соответствует среднему уровню в ЕС. На основе анализа данных предполагается, что подтверждение институционализации современного механизма гендерного равенства, содержание национальных государственных программ и преобладание модели отношений с гражданским обществом в странах Балтии, скорее всего, свидетельствуют о том, что учет гендерной проблематики является еще одним инструментом социальной политики управления людскими ресурсами. Так, Латвия обычно демонстрирует минимальное внимание к развитию институтов учета гендерной проблематики, и даже некоторый регресс в 2013 году. Однако Латвия может считаться более равноправной, чем Литва и Эстония в 2017 году. Среди всех стран, участвовавших в ис-

следованиях, Латвия занимает 10-е место, соответственно Литва, 12-е и Эстония, соответственно, 16-е место. Латвия подняла свой рейтинг в связи с позитивными тенденциями в устранении гендерных разрывов в суб-индексах экономического участия и возможностей, и политических прав. Это предполагает, что скорее социальные изменения, связанные с национальным демографическим и экономическим развитием, чем просто технократическое совершенствование политики равенства, оказывает влияние на текущие статистические показатели, связанные с гендерным равенством.

Ключевые слова: гендерное равенство, учёт гендерной проблематики, механизм гендерного равенства, гендерный разрыв.

Introduction

Gender equality is transformed into one of the fundamental values of the European Union (founded in 1957) by the Treaty of Lisbon of 2007 (EU treaties).

The notion of gender equality politics usually refers to the theory and practice of the influence on elimination of the disparities between genders, i.e. so-called gender gaps in society. Gender equality politics as an integral sign of democratization of societies.

Contemporary gender equality politics in the Baltic States are developed within the frame imposed by European integration and known as a gender mainstreaming approach. The gender mainstreaming refers to the principle of taking a systematic account of the differences between the conditions, situations and needs of women and men in all public policies and actions (EC 1996).

The main postulates of a new institutionalism approach, for instance, new institutions are created or adopted using existing templates, social causations ‘path dependent’, and institutions affect the actors’ construction of identities, self-images and preferences, thus also their behaviour (Hall, Taylor 1996; Powell 2007) are useful for policy research. In case of gender equality, there is a clear relationship between both the Soviet Union or European Union initiatives and the construction of gender equality politics in the Baltic States. The Soviet gender equality policy was formulated on the basis of the approach known as the question of women (*zhenskiiy vopros – женский-вопрос*). Historically, the solution of the woman question lies in advancement towards equality and implies the creation of conditions for social changes defined in terms of women’s emancipation or liberation (The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia 1979). It is argued that in the Baltic States, since 1990/91, innovations in gender equality politics are related rather to reformulation of the concept of gender equality and leading approaches than to the institutional machinery of gender equality policy (Žvinklienė 2016).

Undoubtedly, the Soviet legacy in gender equality issues should be traced as in the official (normative) policy documents and in activities of the institutions responsible for implementation of gender equality as in current actual behaviour of population in the Baltic States. Moreover, the Soviet legacy may be politically employed as either a brake or a buster for development of national gender equality politics.

The research aimed to demonstrate how national gender equality politics were (re)constructed in accordance with international commitments to the UN and the EU

after the restoration of independence in the Baltic States and, consequently, how it affected the current actual state of gender equality in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

From nowadays point of view, the topic of the research can be considered as the employment of an historical comparative perspective which has a little to do with the present of gender equality. The main methodological reason for this choice is a shared postulate of the new institutionalism approach that the present is path dependent.

An empirical framework includes a documentary analysis of available official documents related to the gender equality politics, the analysis of secondary sources, and quantitative data from the *Global Gender Gap Report 2017*.

The construction of contemporary gender equality machinery in the Baltic States

Contemporary gender equality politics in post-communist countries are usually discussed in the context of gender mainstreaming approach and the international commitments to the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU).

In the Baltic States, the first internationally confirmed commitment in the field of gender equality was the (re) ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW1979), which the Soviet Union ratified in 1981 on behalf of its member republics; it was ratified by the independent Estonia in 1991, Latvia in 1992 and Lithuania in 1994.

In 1995, the Baltic States were among the 189 UN member States that unanimously adopted the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) to improve the situation of all women without exception (BPFA 1995). Set out in the BPFA, the concept of gender mainstreaming as a strategy to promote gender equality entered European politics in 1991; however, 1995 became the key year for its adoption by the EU (Pollack, Hafner-Burton 2000).

Implementation of gender mainstreaming implied the (re)construction of the relevant gender equality machinery. In the BPFA document, the national machinery for the advancement of women is seen “as the central policy-coordinating unit inside government. Its main task is to support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective in all policy areas” (BPFA 1995). National machineries dealing with gender issues, often known as gender equality machineries, vary in terms of structures, positioning and location within the overall government.

The ombudsman is seen as an independent institutional mechanism within the gender equality machinery's structure whose purpose is the non-judicial conflict resolution of possible (gender) discrimination. Ombudsman institutions, or institutions with similar responsibilities mandated to deal with discrimination issues, are commonly called equality bodies.

In 1995, the Baltic States applied for EU membership². The application for EU membership implied a national commitment to adopt and implement the European *acquis communautaire* (*acquis*) and to follow the guidelines of the European policy documents³.

Thus, 1995 marks a starting point for the formal re-addressing of national gender equality politics based on an approach to woman mainstreaming that at the time was usually defined in terms of the advancement of women (the woman question) to gender mainstreaming in accordance with international commitments to both the UN and the EU.

In the Baltic States the gender equality machinery comprises legal, parliamentary, governmental, inter- (a mechanism for social dialog), non-governmental levels, and ombudsman institution.

The Legal level

Legally, there is no discontinuity in the state's commitment to gender equality in the Baltic States after the restoration of their independence in 1990/91. The Soviet Constitution lost its effect, but gender equality de jure was secured by the relevant articles present in the reinstated national pre-war constitutions and the new constitutions of Estonia (Estonia's Constitution 1992, article 12), Lithuania (Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania 1992, article 29), and Latvia (Constitution of the Republic of Latvia 1992, article 91) kept its former one.

Estonia often stressed during accession that it was committed to the implementation of gender equality in the field of social policy prior to joining the EU and even before the legal basis for installing administrative units to deal with the task was in place. However, the *Gender Equality Act* (GEA) was formally adopted for the utilitarian purpose of facilitating EU accession, coming into effect on May 1, 2004 (Kuhl 2008; Põldsaar 2008; Sepper, Linntam 2005).

Gender equality is defined as a relatively new concept in Latvia, but the comparably high proportion of working women and a strong tradition of reconciling work and family life are cited as a positive legacy of the Soviet regime (Rastrigina 2015). Latvia did not adopt a specific gender equality law and it seems unlikely it will do so. Documents produced during accession by the Ministry of Welfare such as *The Gender Equality Initiative* (2001) and *Equal Opportunities for Everybody in Latvia* (2001) have remained at the draft stage. Latvia limited its legal commitment to gender equality policy to the *Labour Law* and the *Labour Protection Law* (2002), both of which incorporate the relevant European directives and contain the norms promoting gender equality (Gunda Werner Institute 2012).

Lithuania adopted two anti-discrimination laws: the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (1998) and the Law on Equal Treatment (2003). All current and future European directives on equal opportunities and treatment are incorporated into these laws and are implemented under the supervision of the Ombudsman for Equal Opportunities.

After joining the EU in 2004, the content of the legal level of (gender) the equality machinery was developed due to the *acquis* and national preferences, i.e. gender as a separate ground of discrimination gradually merged into the broadening set of legally protected grounds of discrimination. In 2004, however, only Lithuania among the Baltic States signed and ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW 1999), which

establishes procedures for submitting individual and collective claims of infringement of rights protected under the Convention.

Parliamentary and Governmental Levels

Formally, equality issues are incorporated in the activities of various parliamentary committees and commissions dealing with human rights and social affairs. However, there are attempts to establish a specific parliamentary institution dealing with gender equality. In Estonia, a draft resolution on the formation of a parliamentary study committee to analyse gender equality was initiated in 2015; in Latvia, the Parliamentary Subcommittee on Gender Equality was established in 2003; in Lithuania, the Women's Parliamentary Group initially dealing with the promotion of the equal opportunities law was created in 1996.

The (re)involvement of governmental administrative bodies in the formation, development and implementation of contemporary gender equality politics was initiated by the action plans adopted by national governments and allocated to the ministries dealing with social security matters. In Estonia, measures promoting equality between women and men had been included in the government's action plan and national program for the adoption of the *acquis* since 1998; in Latvia, *The Statement on Gender Equality Implementation*, which was the first strategic document used as the foundation for the development of action plans and documents implementing the goals of the current gender equality policy, was produced in 2001; in Lithuania, the *Action Plan for the Advancement of Women* was adopted by the Lithuanian government already in 1996.

The key institutions for the management of gender equality politics are the national ministries responsible for social security matters and the newly created focal points within their structures: in Estonia, the Gender Equality Bureau in the Ministry of Social Affairs was established in 1998, in Latvia, the Gender Equality Unit within the Department of European and Legal Affairs at the Ministry of Welfare was created in 2003, and in Lithuania, the Labour Market and Equal Opportunities Division at the Ministry of Social Security and Labour dates from 2001.

Such (occasional) institution as the State Councillor (Advisor) on Women's Issues to the Prime Minister was realized only in Lithuania in 1994.

Inter-level

The mechanism for social dialog between governmental and civil society organizations, i.e. the coordinating and consultative bodies for the initial adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA's) commitments, are: in Estonia, the Inter-Ministerial Working Group on Women's and Equal Opportunities Policies created in 1996; in Latvia, the Gender Equality Council charged with ensuring the implementation of gender equality policy at the highest level established in 2002 and reorganized into the Gender Equality Commission in 2010; in Lithuania, the permanent Inter-Ministerial Commission on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men as the primary structure for gender mainstreaming established in 2000.

The Non-Governmental Level

Nowadays, the trade unions are usually described as social partners. The political context of the restoration of independence was very damaging for the contemporary trade union movement in the Baltic States. In recent years, trade union density in the Baltic States is among the lowest in the EU: 6–15% of total employment (Glovackas 2009; European Trade Union Institute; OECD iLibrary).

The Baltic Council of Trade Unions was established in 1999 for the sub-regional coordination of activities, including membership increase and adapting to the challenges of free market conditions. The women's sections are traditionally incorporated in the internal structure of the largest national unions.

Traditionally, trade unions are mediators in non-judicial labour dispute resolution between employee and employer. Theoretically, an individual labour dispute may have gender discrimination dimension. Formally, there are three stages for individual labour dispute resolution: negotiation between employee and employer within the enterprise, application to a labour dispute commission (committee) and finally to a court of law. The labour dispute commission (committee) according to respective laws (a separate law or provisions incorporated in the national Labour Codes) is in force in all three Baltic States.

The number of civic organizations dealing with gender equality issues and their quality in terms of institutional capacities is unevenly distributed across the Baltic States and in different periods of time. The first women's studies centre in the Baltic States was founded in Lithuania in 1992, whereas such centres were created in Estonia in 1997 and Latvia in 1998.

The Ombudsman institution

The creation of the ombudsman institution whose purpose is the non-judicial conflict resolution is regarded as a measure to win public trust for the state and democracy. The main characteristic of the ombudsman is its institutional independence in relation to the authority that appoints him or her and its role must always be supplementary to that of the courts⁴.

Along with the establishment of the *classic* parliamentary ombudsman mainly dealing with maladministration, other parliamentary ombudsmen with special mandates have also been created to address public complaints in specific areas, such as discrimination, children's rights, minorities, media, information, finance and so on.

In the Baltic States, commitment to the democratization of society and the rule of law were also demonstrated by the restoration or creation of the ombudsman institution.

In 1999 in Estonia, the function of the ombudsman was entrusted to the Chancellor of Justice (*Õiguskantsler*), an institution that had first been established in 1938, abolished during Soviet times and re-established in 1993; the investigation of complaints of gender discrimination was formally the responsibility of the institution. In 2007, following the provisions of GEA, the Commissioner for Gender Equality and Equal Treatment was appointed for the first time by the Minister of Social Affairs.

In Latvia, the National Human Rights Office, established in 1995 and reformed in the Ombudsman (*tiesībsargs*) institution in 2007, was formally responsible of dealing with complaints on gender discrimination.

The process of establishing Ombudsman institutions in Lithuania was usually described as a “success story” of inter-agency partnership in the democratization process of post-communist countries (UNDP2005). Actually, in parallel with the founding of the European Ombudsman in Strasbourg, the Parliamentary Ombudsman (*Seimokontrolierius*) dealing with maladministration was established in Lithuania in 1995. It created a precedent for the introduction of the (parliamentary) specialized ombudsmen, including the Ombudsman for Equal Opportunities (for Women and Men) in 1999.

The contemporary Baltic offices of the ombudsman have extensive responsibilities: they should not just combat discrimination in individual cases, but also promote ideas of equality within society, i.e. combat structural inequalities.

The detailed description of that time gender equality politics aimed to demonstrate, that in the common context of accession, the three Baltic States expressed different levels of enthusiasm towards the institutionalization of (gender) equality issues and its machinery. In essence, accession accelerated a process of revitalization and reformation of either shelved or dismantled Soviet institutional gender equality mechanisms rather than creating brand new ones to implement a gender mainstreaming approach in public policy. The construction of this machinery was actually similar in terms of key institutions yet different with respect to the time they were officially established.

The differences between the Baltic States in the construction of gender equality machinery were overcome formally by 2007, when an ombudsman institution dealing with discrimination on several grounds, among them gender, was institutionalized in all three states. The final institutionalization of the equality body (ombudsman) in Estonia and Latvia coincided with the declaration of the European Year for Equal Opportunities for All (2007). However, the 2007 celebration of European diversity in terms of gender, race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation also commemorates the disappearance of gender (discrimination) from political and public attention.

Lithuania’s international political interest in upholding its reputation as a country concerned about women’s rights and gender equality remains stable. During the Lithuanian Presidency of the EU in 2013, it chose to review the development of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of gender equality in the member states. Thus, after joining the EU, Lithuania has retained its overall leadership among the Baltic States in the management of gender equality politics especially at the governmental responsibility level, i.e. in the preparation and implementation of programs and action plans. Estonia, however, leads in implementing gender mainstreaming methods and tools (the legal obligation to undertake gender impact assessment and/or gender budgeting). Latvia has regressed somewhat in this respect (EIGE 2014).

Missed Opportunities of the EU Enlargement

In the early 2000s, gender mainstreaming was often characterized as a “missed opportunity” of the EU enlargement in academic and civil groups’ circles because the issue was not prioritized in negotiations between the EU and Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries selected for EU membership (Bretherton 2002). The EU on

its part stated that it successfully transformed its policy from a narrow focus on equal treatment in the workplace to an institutional commitment to mainstreaming gender across the policy process (Pollack, Hafner-Burton 2000).

The critical reflection of academic and women's civil groups on the EU requirements on gender equality policies during the negotiation process should be approached with some scepticism. Moreover, their criticisms were mainly related to addressing gender issues not sufficiently clearly in policy areas other than labour market policies and social policies: for instance, human trafficking or violence against women.

Indeed, according to the Commission, equal treatment legislation is a "firmly established integral part" of the *acquis*, which is limited to employment and social policy. On the other hand, "Combating gender inequality and social exclusion is considered by the EU to be first and foremost the responsibility of member states and their national, regional and local authorities in cooperation with the full range of bodies involved, including social partners and NGOs" (Van der Molen, Novikova 2005). Furthermore, any discussion of a missed opportunity in the context of enlargement also has to take into consideration the international commitments to the CEDAW and the BPFA adopted by the candidate states. The documents of the CEDAW, BPFA and the EU's *acquis* constitute a frame for gender equality politics in the EU member and candidate states. Hence, having secured the principal key areas of employment and social policy, there was no need for the European Commission to force gender mainstreaming in negotiations, since that was the purview of the UN organizations.

Another "missed opportunity" highlights the potential of political capacities of civil society in general and women's/gender equality agencies in particular. This issue can be discussed in terms of the institutionalization of the relationship between authorities (policy makers) and civil society.

In the 1990s, the participatory-democratic model, in which either individuals or organizations have access to policy making, was equally and actively promoted in all of the Baltic States by foreign-based initiatives, particularly by the UNDP, the Council of Europe and the Nordic Council of Ministers⁵ (Rai 2003). In practice, however, a rather deliberative democracy model predominated, i.e. the partnership in policy making between authorities and either individuals or organizations is mainly based on the technical aspects of decision-making, such as communications with civil society representatives during round tables, conferences and so on.

In the 1990s, the connections between actors on the different levels of the gender equality machinery were stronger in Lithuania than in Estonia or Latvia due to a better "bottom-up" personal political mobility of the Lithuanian actors. The detailed Lithuanian case of the Ombudsman for Equal Opportunities (for women and men) illustrates how civil initiatives may be articulated from below, but enforcement and institutionalization always come from above⁶.

By 2004, all of the Baltic States chose an expert-bureaucratic model to implement gender mainstreaming, yet even this model was weakened by the absence of gender experts with specialized training and a sophisticated understanding of gender relationships in administrative structures. The expert-bureaucratic model reflects an "integrationist" approach that introduces a gender perspective into existing policy processes

without challenging policy models, which actually legitimate the marginalization of women's advocacy NGOs and feminist/gender researchers in the policy-making process (Van der Molen, Novikova 2005).

In the Baltic States, therefore, the political potential of the civil society is actually very limited in terms of participatory democracy, i.e. open access to policy making, but is in the frame of deliberative democracy.

The last but not least “missed opportunity” of the EU enlargement related to the context of human rights. The restored independence offered “entitled nations” an opportunity to impose the *lex talionis*⁷ and in Estonia and Latvia, unlike Lithuania, citizenship became legally ethicised (Giordano 1997). The missed opportunities of gender mainstreaming, first of all the acceptance of ethicised and obviously gendered citizenship in Estonia and Latvia for EU membership, can be interpreted in terms of the pre-eminence of the EU's geopolitical interests over democratization and gender equality politics in the strategy of enlargement.

Effect of Gender Mainstreaming on Gender Gaps

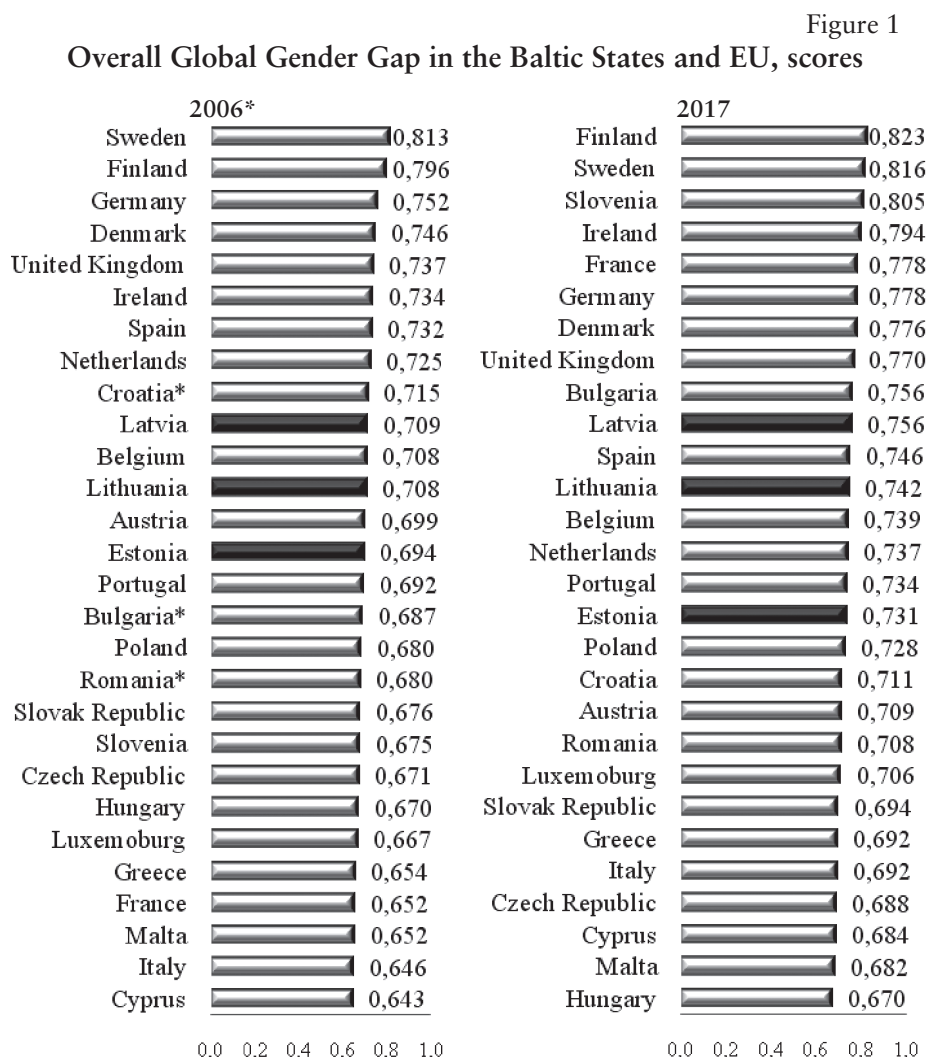
The evaluators of gender mainstreaming practices usually claim that the expected transformative effect on institutions, practices, and politics on the ground has not necessarily occurred (Pittman 2014). Weaknesses of the policies of gender equality in some member states are seen as coming from the misapplication of the principle of gender mainstreaming (Benítez 2016) and a rather noncommittal manner of the EU gender policies, supported mainly through “soft law”, i.e. when interventions are rather advisory (Daly 2005, Walby 2004).

Despite that gender equality is a fundamental European value and policy priority, the recent *Report on equality between women and men in the EU* notes that there are still gaps in daily life and practice and discrimination based on gender still occurs. Women are discriminated in the labour market, and the employment gap and gender pay gap remain. Women are also relatively underrepresented in decision-making both in politics and on the boards of big companies (EC 2017).

Exploring differences and communalities in actual gender equality in the Baltic States the well-known Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) used in the Global Gender Gap Reports is employed. GGGI is a scale from 0 (inequality) to 1 (equality). The *Global Gender Gap Report 2017* benchmarks 144 countries on their progress towards gender equality and provides country rankings that allow for effective comparisons.

The gender gaps in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are overviewed in the context of the EU.

Figure 1 provides Overall Gender Gap Index in 28th EU countries. It shows that, two Nordics countries (Sweden and Finland) take the top spots among EU countries, remaining among the highest-ranked countries in the region since 2006. The third-place position belongs to Slovenia with 80% of its overall gender gap closed. It is one of the fastest-improving countries – since 2006, Slovenia has closed approximately 13% of its overall gender gap.



* Countries marked with asterisks (Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia) in 2006 were not EU members, they were included because of the comparability of data.

Source: elaborated by the authors using data of the Global Gender Gap Index Report 2006, Global Gender Gap Index Report 2017.

On the other hand, the lowest-ranked country in EU is Hungary, which has closed only 67% of its overall gender gap.

According to the Global Gender Gap Index, Baltic States are among the EU Member States with the average / slightly above-average gender equality. In 2017, the progress on closing the global gender gap in Latvia stands at a score of 0,756 meaning that gender gap of 24% remains to be closed; Lithuania's score is 0,742 and Estonia has a lowest score of 0,731.

Almost all EU countries have increased their overall score compared to 2006, except Croatia, which is the only EU country with the decrease in its overall score. Nevertheless, Latvia and Lithuania are continuously maintaining the same ranking within EU compared 2006 and 2017 – Latvia ranks 10th and Lithuania 12th. Moreover, Estonia experiences a decline in its overall Global Gender Gap Index ranking slipping several ranks – in 2006 it was ranked 14th, while in 2017 – 16th.

The overall Gender Gap Index is calculated as average of four subindexes that provide a fuller context for the country's performance. The Gender Gap Index examines the gap between men and women in four fundamental categories (i.e. subindexes): Economic participation and opportunity, Education attainment, Political empowerment and Health and survival.

The magnitude of gender gaps on these subindexes is the combined result of various socioeconomic, policy and cultural variables (GGGR 2017):

- *Educational attainment subindex* captures the gap between women's and men's access to education through ratios of women to men in primary-, secondary- and tertiary-level education. The ratio of the female literacy rate to the male literacy rate is included to illustrate a longer-term view of each country's ability to educate women and men in equal numbers.
- *Health and survival subindex* provides an overview of the differences between women's and men's health through the gap between women's and men's healthy life expectancy and the sex ratio at birth. The healthy life expectancy measure estimates the number of years that women and men can expect to live in good health, taking into account the years lost due to violence, disease, malnutrition and other relevant factors. The sex ratio at birth variable aims to capture the phenomenon of "missing women", that prevails in countries with a strong son preference.
- *Economic participation and opportunity subindex* measures the gender gaps in economic participation, remuneration and the advancement. The participation gap is captured using the difference between women and men in labour force participation rates. The remuneration gap is captured through the ratio of estimated female-to-male earned income and through the wage equality for similar work. The disparities in the advancement of women and men are estimated through the ratio of women to men among legislators, senior officials and managers, and the ratio of women to men among technical and professional workers.
- *Political empowerment subindex* measures the differences between men and women at the highest level of political decision-making through the ratio of women to men in ministerial positions and the ratio of women to men in parliamentary positions, and in term of years in executive office (prime minister or president) over the last 50 years.

Figures 2 and 3 display the scores of European Union countries by all four subindexes.

Educational attainment and Health and survival subindexes are those with the lowest differences in scores, with most countries clustering around a fairly high achievement point near parity.

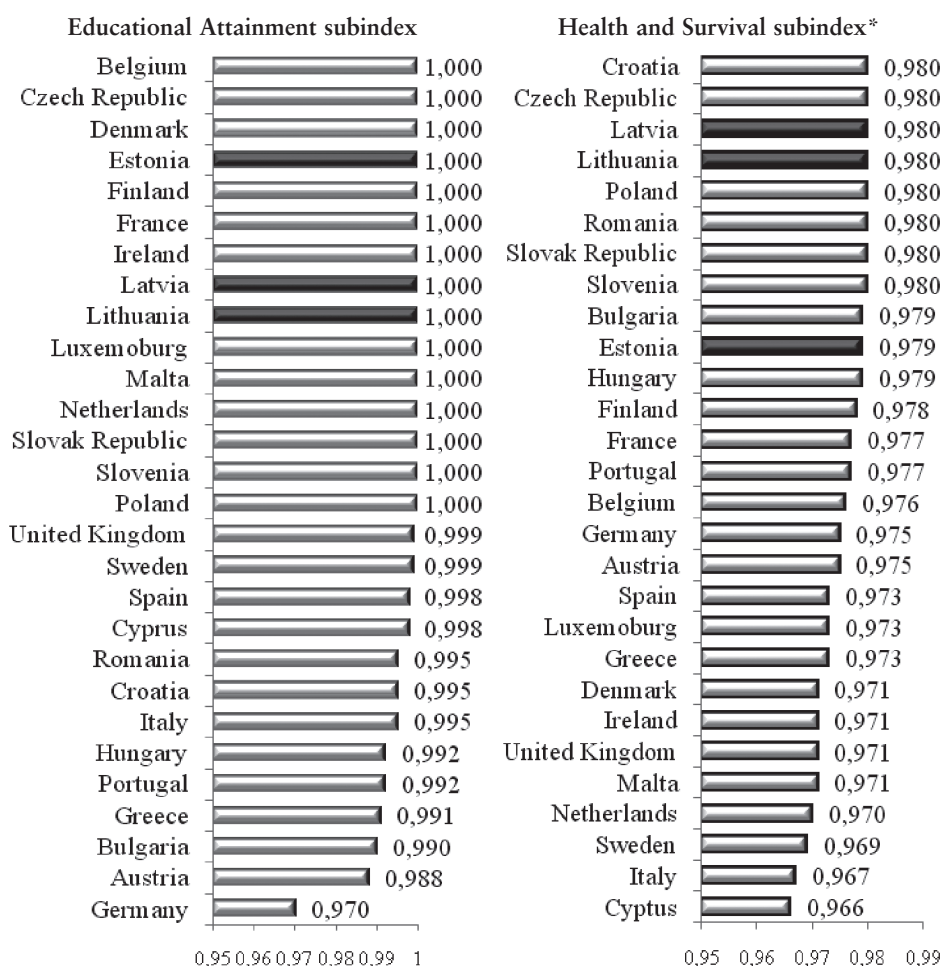
According to the Educational attainment subindex, half of EU countries (i.e. 14 out of 28) have fully closed their Educational attainment gender gaps, all three Baltic States are among them.

In 2017, eight EU countries have *managed* to achieve gender parity on Health and survival subindex, including Latvia and Lithuania. Estonia, along with Bulgaria and Hungary, follow next and performs high score on health subindex, being only one percent below of the best.

Generally, it could be said that Baltic States maintain their strong performance on fully (or almost fully in case of Estonia) closing both their Educational attainment and Health and survival gender gaps.

Figure 2

Gender Gap on Educational Attainment and Health and Survival subindexes in the Baltic States and EU, 2017



* On Health and Survival subindex the highest possible score is 0,980 (parity)

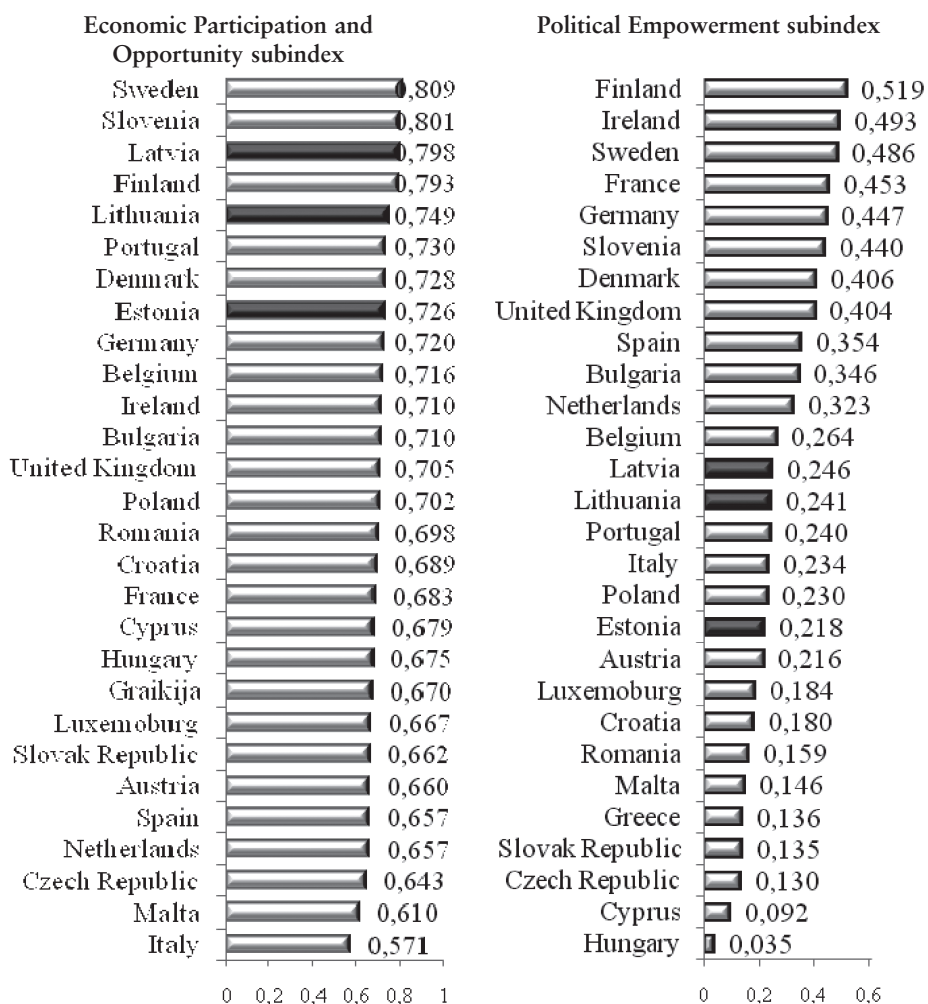
Source: elaborated by the authors using data of the Global Gender Gap Index Report 2006, Global Gender Gap Index Report 2017.

While the previous two subindexes present very optimistic results, the same cannot be said for the economic sphere. Here in fact the gender gap among EU countries begins to widen from 81% of the gap being closed in Sweden to 57% in Italy (see Figure 3).

Nevertheless, the Baltic States are relatively highly placed among European Union countries – Latvia and Lithuania occupy the top five spots on this subindex. Estonia follows closely and as well scores above the EU average. It ranks 8th on the Economic participation and opportunity subindex in EU.

Figure 3

Gender Gap on the Economic Participation and Political Empowerment subindexes in the Baltic States and EU, 2017



Source: elaborated by the authors using data of the Global Gender Gap Index Report 2006, Global Gender Gap Index Report 2017.

It should be mentioned that women all around the World continue to be largely marginalized from the *political sphere*. According The Global Gender Gap Report, the *political empowerment* is one of the spheres where the biggest gender gap exists. In 2017, the world's highest Political empowerment subindex reaches 0,750 (Iceland), while in European Union – 0,519 (Finland).

Hungary is the worst-performing country in the EU on the Political empowerment subindex, it records the lowest score (0,035) meaning that gender gap of 65% remains to be closed.

Looking at the Baltic States, it is evident that political sphere in the terms of women's empowerment here is an issue as well. Despite good educational attainment, women in Baltic States have relatively little political empowerment. Latvia and Lithuania rank in the middle of the European Union countries (13th and 14th respectively), having closed 25% and 24% of their political gender gap. While, Estonia is placed in the lower half of the list within EU rankings, standing at a score of 0,218 on political empowerment subindex. Estonia's lower performance on this subindex compared to Latvia and Lithuania is partly caused due to the fact that unlike in Latvia, which currently has a female prime minister and female parliament speaker, and Lithuania, which has a female president, no female politician has managed to hold such high positions in Estonia.

Summing up the results of Global Gender Gap Report, it should be underlined that no country in the world has fully closed its overall gender gap. By looking at the individual scores of EU countries it is observed that the region performs very well in the educational and health dimensions. In both cases it can be affirmed that women are approaching to close the gap with men. While, larger gender gaps emerge in the economic and political spheres.

Gender equality in Baltic States stands at the EU average, according to the overall Gender Gap Index, with the scores recorded on Education attainment, Health and Economic participation subindexes being superior to the average percentage in EU. However, the major challenge for the Baltic States is gender imbalance in political sphere. Women's Political empowerment is relative poor, placing Baltic States on the middle and lower-middle positions within European Union.

Conclusions

The persistence of significant *inequalities* between women and men confirms the relevance of the gender equality issues for all EU countries.

In the 1990s, there were high hopes that gender mainstreaming would revolutionize the way that gender was addressed, would transform institutions to become more gender equitable, and would radically reduce gender inequalities and discriminations. Nowadays, it is actually recognized that introduction of the principle of gender mainstreaming has been merely rhetorical in most cases.

In 1995, after application of Baltic States for EU membership started the formal re-addressing of national gender equality politics based on an approach to woman mainstreaming. In the context of accession, the three Baltic States expressed different

levels of enthusiasm for the (re)institutionalization of (gender) equality issues and the related machinery. The construction of this machinery in three Baltic States was actually similar in terms of key institutions but different with respect to the time they were officially established.

The differences between the Baltic States in the institutionalization of the contemporary structure of gender equality machinery were overcome once they became EU members and national legislation on gender equality was fully harmonised with EU law, i.e. in 2007.

The confirmation of the institutionalization of the gender equality machinery, the content of national governmental activities and the predominant relationship model with civil society in the Baltic States indicate that gender mainstreaming is likely yet another and the most recent social policy tool for the management of human resources.

According to the Global Gender Gap Index, the Baltic States are among the EU Member States with the average / slightly above-average gender equality.

Latvia usually demonstrates a minimal attachment to gender mainstreaming and its institutions among the Baltic States. Moreover, Latvia has regressed somewhat in this respect in 2013. In quantitative terms, however, current Latvia can be considered as having more equality than Lithuania and Estonia. Among all countries participated in the research in 2017, Latvia ranks 10th, Lithuania – 12th, and Estonia, accordingly, 16th.

The case of Latvia levering the rank up due to positive trends in closing gender gaps in both Economic Participation and Opportunity and Political Empowerment subindexes confirms an assumption that rather social changes related to national demographical and economic development than merely technocratic sophistication of gender equality politics has a profound impact on current statistical indexes related to gender equality.

Notes:

(1) This article is based on research project “Quality of democracy and equal opportunities: attitudes and social practice of Lithuanians” funded by a grant (No. GER-012/2017) from the Research Council of Lithuania. Period of implementation 2017–2018.

(2) In 1993, the European Council recognized the right of the CEE countries to join the EU upon fulfilment of three political, economic and administrative accession conditions known as the Copenhagen criteria. See: Accession (Copenhagen) criteria, EC, 1993. Available: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/policy/glossary/terms/accession-criteria_en (accessed 01.10.2017).

(3) Gender equality as an objective of European integration was formalized by the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) and further transformed into one of the values of the EU by the Treaty of Lisbon (2007). See *EU treaties*, EU. Available: https://europa.eu/european-union/law/treaties_en (accessed 01.10.2017).

(4) Research on the ombudsman chiefly investigates the institution from a legal standpoint and usually from a comparative perspective.

(5) The (women’s/gender equality) agencies most effectively influence government policy if they are located at a high level within the national decision-making hierarchy, have a clear mandate and functional responsibility, are linked to civil society groups, have adequate human and financial resources and are accountable to the public.

(6) The ‘top-down’ rather than ‘bottom-up’ principle, at the core of most political and social initiatives, constitutes a significant peculiarity of civic identity in the Baltic States since Soviet times, including *perestroika* in the mid-1980s.

(7) The principle or law of retaliation by which a punishment inflicted should correspond in degree and kind to the offense of the wrong doer, as in an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; retributive justice. See: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/lex-talionis> (accessed 20.11.2017).

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