



Opening Speech
PES Women Annual Conference
My Body, my rights
Warsaw, 3-4 December

Dear PES Women Members, dear friends, dear Kazimiera,

Thank you all for gathering here in Warsaw for the PES Women Annual Conference, the closure of our one year campaign “My Body, my Rights”.

PES Women started this campaign “My Body, My Rights” at the eve of the International Women’s Day, which coincided with the 15th Anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, which took place in New York at the yearly Commission on the Status of Women.

2010 has been an important year for women’s rights and gender equality at national, European and Global level. This is why we wanted to mark 2010 year with something that we, socialist, social-democrats and progressive women’s movements have fought for in the seventies and have achieved tremendous progress in. But unfortunately we have noticed a strong backlash, conservative backlash in the past decade.

2010 witnessed the Beijing Platform, the revision of the Millennium Development Goals, the European Commission’s Women’s Rights Charter as well as a gender equality strategy, the Spanish Presidency and their priority to combat violence against women and now here in Poland, our support to the Polish women to show that a progressive way for women in Europe is the only way forward in the 21st Century.

The Global Approach

In March 2010, the 15th anniversary of the **Beijing Platform for Action** was an important landmark as head of states once again revised the global women’s rights goals set in 1995.

Looking in retrospective the Beijing Platform has gone through **three eras of shaping** a global women's rights approach.

- 1) The Beijing Platform was the result of social democrats and progressive NGOs' commitment starting already in **1975**. The first meeting focused on **women AND development**, while the focus in 1985 changed to **Women IN Development**. In **1995** the **Beijing** Platform took shape concentrating on **Human Rights are Women's Rights**.

This was a **shift** from **instrumentalising** women for development **towards recognizing women as bearers of human rights**. We had achieved a global consensus that women are equal to men not merely politically and economically speaking (the right to vote and education) but also when it comes to social and personal rights.

At that time we were full of hope and enthusiasm that around the world women would achieve tremendous progress with respect to their rights across all fields and with respect to gender equality.

- 2) But in **2000**, we experienced a first wave of **reverse** approach; a **political change** took place in the **US** with the election of a republican conservative President. A similar tendency followed slowly but steadily in the **European Union and its institutions**. At that point, the Beijing Platform was revised into the Millennium Development Goals, narrowing down the gender equality issues. **Europe** came to a situation where the **smallest common denominator** in Europe was used for women's rights and in Europe we could no longer talk about basic common values in Europe. Poland's conservative approach towards women's rights in relation to other Member States is a clear example of this approach, where Europe does not talk about rights but only health.

- 3) After an **economic growth** in the beginning of the **twenty first** century lead by **capitalistic** values, we entered times of crisis where the weakest suffer most in the long term; women, children and others on the margins of society. The recent **financial crisis** starting in 2008 and **escalating in a socio-economic crisis endangers** even more **equality issues** and **women's rights**.

But while hope for a new progressive impulse from the US was expected with the election of Barack Obama, the **European Union experiences a reign of conservative and right wing** governments. At the same time we witness a tendency in **Central and Latin America** of **strong religious lobbying**, endangering the developments within women's rights and equal opportunities matters.

So the **current situation** has left **little space for the Beijing platform to recover** from the **conservative backlash** and stand-by mode. Socialist, social democrats and progressive forces, however, felt that they have a

responsibility in taking action at the 15th anniversary of the Beijing Platform and re-shape and re-vitalize priorities related to women's rights and gender equality, especially on Maternal Health

According to the recent United Nations figures, 536 000 women and girls still die every year as a result of complications during pregnancy, childbirth or six weeks following delivery. An estimated 68,000 women annually die as a result of unsafe abortions. The majority in developing countries as a result of medical problems which are largely preventable and treatable if the assistance, tools and infrastructure exist and are accessible and affordable. Moreover, in developed regions there are 9 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births compared to 450 maternal deaths in developing regions, where 14 countries have maternal mortality rates of at least 1,000 per 100,000 live births. We cannot accept such figures in the twenty first century.

The Commission on the Status of Women concluded that the issue of maternal health is the one issue where the least progress was made in the last years. That is why in New York at the Commission on the Status of Women, the GPF and ECOSY together with our Socialist and Socio-democratic European Ministers we signed a declaration calling governments to **call on all governments to strengthen their efforts concerning maternal health** and other Sexual and Reproductive Right in order to ensure progress.

Moreover, the current global governmental investment towards **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)** should be one of agenda priorities in order to reach the set **targets by 2015**. Several of the MDGs targets contribute directly to improving women's rights and enhancing gender equality, including maternal health. They are basic human rights and **contribute towards women's empowerment in the fields of social, economic and financial development**, especially in the framework of the framework of the economic crisis. Giving and **securing women's rights, choice** and access to **information**.

No matter what women's sexual and reproductive situation and choice is, she should have the opportunity and access to fully carry on her choice. Her choice should not be determined by geographical position or social status. Women should be able to feely attend receive affordable medical treatment and assistance. But they should also be informed about the possible choice and assistance available without perceiving social or legal pressure.

We need to ensure **sex education** for girls and boys from an early age and throughout their educational course, **medical** assistance, including

treatments, checks, and counseling tools and psychological assistance. We are pro-choice and that means that abortion should be an option if it is the woman's wish based on a well-informed judgment. Therefore medical infrastructure, such as family planning centers and well equipped public hospitals, are indispensable.

But I am also a believer of prevention and promoting contraception methods, such as female condoms and emergency contraception. 2 days ago, it was World AIDS DAY. According to the recently published figures by UNAIDS the number of people living with HIV globally is now at 33.4 million and although 2.7 million people became newly infected with HIV in 2008, good news is that this is a decrease by 17% over the last eight years.

New HIV infections have fallen by nearly 20% in the last 10 years, AIDS-related deaths are down by nearly 20% in the last five years, and the total number of people living with HIV is stabilizing.

I am still shocked that despite the decrease of new HIV infected people, recent figures show that today around the world still 5 people are becoming infected with HIV for every 2 people that have access to treatment. There is an urgency to keep up the support for new treatments and prevention campaigns for combating HIV/AIDS.

We need to make sure that even in times of crisis we do not forget our responsibility and solidarity: on the one hand we need to support organisations such as AIVI and Global Campaign for Microbicides, with which we have worked in past, to develop new treatments and prevention methods and on the other hand that these reach the most at risk in being infected by HIV/AIDS. Let's also not forget that a big part of affected people are women, transmitting it to their children, because they don't have the knowledge or access to new treatments, that are often

As UN Secretary General said 2 days ago; "*We have finally reached the first part of Millennium Development Goal 6 by halting and beginning to reverse the spread of HIV*". But now we need to work towards achieving the 2015 Goal; the UNAIDS calls for the virtual elimination of mother-to-child HIV transmission by 2015. An estimated 370 000 children are born with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa every year and only 45% of HIV-positive pregnant women are receiving antiretroviral therapy prophylaxis in low- and middle-income countries.

All the measures and tools leads to a progressive development of women's status in the society as a whole and ensures their personal and social

wellbeing position. We hope that the new UN Gender Entity will put Sexual and Reproductive Rights as a key priority of its working programme.

European Approach

We took our campaign also to the European level, especially in support of the Spanish Presidency who had put one of the main priorities of the Presidency combating violence against women.

While Europe was given the great opportunity of having a women Commissioner in charge of gender equality, presenting 2 important papers (the Women's Rights Charter and the Gender Equality Strategy), we saw only the Spanish comrades pushing for a true gender equality driven agenda.

Viviane Reding, Commissioner in charge of Women's Rights, has on 2 occasions missed a chance on showing true commitment to gender equality and making it a priority for the EU and for all member states. On 8 March 2010, the European Commission presents a 5 page document which is the so-called Women's Charter in which the EC reiterates its commitment towards gender equality in all policy fields. It is a symbolic text that has no real impact on measuring achievements on gender equality. While President of the Commission Mr Barroso promises ambitious targets, Mrs Reding has made little effort in making even the Europe 2020 Strategy for growth and employment gender mainstreamed.

After a weak Commission's Women's Rights Charter presented in March 2010 and little ambition from the Commission, the hope for an ambitious and strong EU Gender Equality Strategy for the next 5 years was gigantic among women movements, especially in times of financial and economic crisis when these issues are often pushed aside. We have been underlining to the Commission that investing in gender equality is a long-term investment leading towards social and economic progress. But the Strategy failed again in having binding measures and a target driven text, leaving the strategy as an a la carte menu from which Member States to freely to pick and choose. One of the things that was missing in the strategy is a clear women's health policy and thus also reference to sexual and reproductive rights.

The Spanish Presidency on the contrary proposed an EU help-line for women, a European Observatory on violence-based data and last but not least a European Protection Order giving all women throughout Europe the same protection and legal assistance. Also under the motto 'My Body, My

Rights', PES Women called on Member States and the Commission to fully support this initiative.

Gender –based/male violence is considered to be the major cause of death and invalidity of women aged 16 to 44, greater than cancer and road accidents. All forms (sexual, psychological and physical) of violence against women should be a criminal offence in all countries of the European Union and punished severely. Statistics have shown that one in three women will be a victim of violence during their lifetime and 10% will be victims of rape or attempted rape. These facts are totally unacceptable and each of us must act firmly to eradicate this problem.

National Approach

Today we are here in Poland to give our support to our Polish comrades in their fight for equal rights for women, including sexual and reproductive rights as well as in their local election campaign which second round will take place this Sunday. Thank you Kazimiera for hosting us here today.

Is it normal that still today here in Europe, in Poland a woman is refused to have an abortion even though her health was at serious risk? Is it responsible of governments to push women, especially the women of socially deprived background, into clandestine situation, including on organized boats in international waters, risking serious unsafe and un-professional interventions? Or Roma women in certain Eastern European countries that go into hospital for an abortion are told that they have been sterilized?

Is it normal that in Europe, an Irish young lady is denied the after morning pill as the person responsible for giving access to this pill believed that his own religious beliefs prevailed that of the young women's choice and right?

Is it normal that due to budgetary cuts in France, the government has been closing down Family Planning Centre and programmes?

Conclusions

The 21st century for women in Europe and around the world should be the same, no matter where you live, no matter who is governing your country and no matter what your status is.

But unfortunately we have not reached this yet, we need to

- Mobilize women and men to create a movement

- We need to increase education and awareness raising
- We need to improve medical assistance and infrastructure in order to guarantee that each woman has a free choice, a well-informed choice and a choice that does not depend on your social or geographical status.
- We need to take stock from our sister parties like in Portugal where they had a referendum on abortion or like in France where they had strong prevention campaign on HIV/AIDS.
- We need to keep vigilant in order to regress more, like it could be in Hungary

Today and tomorrow we will be debating these topics and I look forward to a fruitful debate.