

## **Institutional gender equality mechanisms in Lithuania: (trans)formation and role in developing state feminism.**

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One of the Lithuanian state development goals, set in Strategy “Lithuania 2030” (adopted in 2012) is the integration into Baltic-Nordic countries region, based on common values. Nordic countries are world widely acknowledged as the leaders on gender equality policies, which are a crucial part of state feminism.

Since the mid -1990s the concept of state feminism has been widely used to study the relations between women’s movements and women’s policy agencies. Some scholars state that women policy agencies (WPAs) are a potential conduit for women’s movement actors and ideas to enter the affair of government and to influence the process formulation and implementation, thus these institutions are seen as (potential) institutional relays of feminist women’s movements ideas and actors within the state (McBride, Mazur,& Lovenduski 2010); others discuss the declarative character of these state mechanisms and their marginal influence on public policy formation and the articulation of women's interests (Alvarez 1990; Weeks 1994; Waylen 1996; Steinhilber 2002).

However there is a lack of researches on women movements and women’s policy agencies relations in the context of state feminism in post-soviet countries. According to Mazur and McBride (2008: 267), for women in these countries, associating “feminism” and “state” is not desirable outcome; women’s movements actors are suspicious of WPAs as potential partners in pursuing a feminist agenda.

Moreover, despite the common definitional understanding of institutional mechanisms of gender equality, there are differences in their conceptualization, which depends on the political contexts obtaining in individual states (Shrin M. Rai, 2003).

Lithuania is known as one of the first post-soviet countries, which adopted the Law on Women’s and Men’s Equality (1998) and started the development of WPAs by establishing the Office of Women’s and Men’s Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (1999). However during the transition to the democracy national machinery for promotion of gender equality took the form of reconstitution and reconfiguration.

The goal of the paper is to analyse the development of institutional mechanism of gender equality and its relations to women’s movement in Lithuania during two periods: a) since the restoration of state independence b) after EU membership. The analysis is based on feminist institutionalism approach, acknowledged the mutual impact of actors’ values and institutional rules, norms and policies on gendering process. The paper highlights the following questions: does the establishment of WPAs indicate the success of women’s movement? Are WPAs the catalysts for promoting gender equality and conduits for the women’s movement ideas to get into political agenda and to achieve gender sensitive political outcomes? The first part of the paper will focus on the analysis of factors, which influenced the (trans-) formations of institutional gender equality mechanisms in Lithuania. The perception of these agencies from the perspective of different actors (NGOs, parliament and government members, academics) will be presented in the second part.

**Keywords:** *women’s policy agencies, women movement, gender equality.*

