

**WOMEN**  
**IN BALTIC SOCIETIES:**  
**PAST AND PRESENT**

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**Women in Baltic Societies:  
Past and Present**

Edited by **M. Golubeva** and **D. Hanovs**

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*Ilze Ostrovska*

## **CHANGING GENDER IDENTITY AS A CHALLENGE TO POLITICAL SPACE. IS IT THE CASE IN LATVIA?**

### **Introduction**

The number of transitions in the post-communist world grows together with experience: lately scientists began to speak about the fourth transition – the national one, which is not less significant than the other, classical ones – transition to sovereignty, market economy and democracy. The transition of gender identity being the fifth one and not less important, it has to be said that it is still in the periphery of scientific discourse in Latvia. At the same time the latter has mutual impact relations with the four remaining ones. It has its reflection in politics too.

Since the elections in 1990 when the parliament deputies were elected through genuine, competitive, open elections, the percentage of elected women in the Parliament of Latvia has increased substantially and now is 21 per cent (see Table1). But has the power share of women parliamentarians also increased? Has their decision-making capacity increased? Or their access to the distribution of the material recourses in society, especially during the privatization process? The greatest problem to my mind is that equal gender political representation and participation from the qualitative point of view is not discussed at all. At best – the quantitative measurements, though also exceptionally seldom.

There are practically no analyses concerning women's share in the

highest positions of the executive power – in the Cabinet of Ministers. Figures witness that from this perspective women's contribution has been exceptionally small in Latvia (see Table 3).

What are the determinants which do not allow women – having all in all higher educational census than men – ten years after the transition to democracy to enter the field of power on a more stable and profound basis? The problems connected with gender identity can be named as the last in a wide range (economy, cultural stereotypes, institutional functioning), but not the least.

First of all, our transition includes changes in the relations with the state as the central dimension in the whole of transitional space. Gender identity is not an exception. It has been largely acknowledged that the Soviet state could not but play almost the most significant role in the constitution and framing of gender relations.<sup>1</sup> Consequently the process of the collapse of the state and the formation of the nation states and creation of a completely new political space had their influence on the development of gender relations, roles and identity.

Media served as the main providers of the Soviet state family policy (which was supposed to include any policy towards gender relations automatically). Today formally there is no state-owned media in Latvia (except for “Valdības Vestnesis” – “Government Announcement”) – only private and so-called public radio and TV channels, financed by the state.

Has the role of the media – concerning gender problems – changed during ten years after the proclamation of independence and transition to democracy? Do media still provide official state policy as concerns gender relations or do they have their own opinion? If yes then what values have been proclaimed?

During the last ten years the society in post-Soviet states underwent drastic changes: artificially constructed equalisation

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<sup>1</sup> I. Tartakovskaya, ‘The Changing Representation of Gender Roles in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Press’, in: S. Ashwin (ed.), *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, London/New York: nk 2000, p.118-136

gave place to economic and social polarisation, unseen in other parts of Europe, which also has a gender dimension. It could not but influence relations in the society – including gender relations. Taken together, the influence of all the major actors – state, media and society, determines the changing gender identity. But are their driving forces aimed in the same direction? Do they equally contribute to equalitarianism and democracy?

### **Politics: Representation and Empowerment**

It seems that Latvia cannot serve as a drastic example of political marginalisation of women lately – as far as their representation in the Parliament (the Saeima) is concerned. More than one fifth of deputies are women in 2001, though when the 7<sup>th</sup> Saeima in 1998 was elected they were only 17. The peculiarity of the functioning of the representative body in Latvia is its changing composition – some deputies take the positions in the executive bodies and instead of them there appear new deputies from the candidates' electoral lists and according to their ranking in the result of popular voting during the elections.

*Table1*

#### **Women Deputies Elected to the Parliament in Latvia since 1990**

Year	Parliament Of Latvia	% of women deputies
1990	The Supreme Council Of the Republic of Latvia	4
1993	5 <sup>th</sup> Saeima	15
1995	6 <sup>th</sup> Saeima	8
1998	7 <sup>th</sup> Saeima	17 (21)*

Source: Latvija. Pārskats par tautas attīstību. 2001. (Latvia. UNDP Development Report) Riga, UNDP, 2001, p.144.

The level of the representation of women since 1993 when the proportional elections took place for the first time since 1934, also has increased. (Table1). For almost a decade the ruling coalition was

composed mainly from the right wing parties – conservative, liberal, nationalistic – in Latvia. The liberal party Latvian Way is represented with four women deputies, conservative party People's Party – with eight women deputies (out of 24 deputies in total which makes one third of all the deputies of the party), Nationalistic union Fatherland and Freedom/*LNNK* is represented with 3 women. The newly formed party New Christian Party (it was established as a result of the split of the centrist party New Party) has one woman deputy. All together the ruling coalition is comparatively rich in female deputies – 16 women. The Social Democrats are in the opposition, and there are only three women among them. Two women deputies represent the other part of the former New Party, they managed to create a new parliamentary fraction, but have not joined any party.

There is still one more party, For Equal Rights in a United Latvia which is a left-wing party uniting several political parties with practically common electorate – mainly Russian-speaking citizens of Latvia. There are no women deputies from this party in the Saeima. The conservative People's party, New Party and Social Democrats were the newcomers to the parliament in 1998. Just among the deputies of these parties women were represented more than among the deputies of the 'old' ones.

It is not difficult to notice the exceptionally large representation of women in the ranks of one of newcomers – People's Party. To explain this it seems that first of all the institutional factors have to be taken into account. The People's party was a latecomer in politics and appeared on the political scene unexpectedly for the "old" parties as an undesirable competitor. It is one man's – previous Prime Minister's – party. Being a millionaire he established the party using his own financial resources and according to the principles of creating a new business venture. All the deputies have put their signatures under the treaty according to which they have to pay a certain sum of money in case they prefer to leave the fraction and/or join some other fraction or party. The voting of the fraction People's Party in the Latvian Parliament is unanimous with practically no exceptions. The model of the management in the party is regarded as highly authoritarian. This can explain the high number of women in the fraction – they are used to obey without

objections on the one hand and therefore are regarded as more submissive material for the voting machine on the other hand.

The New Party, represented in the Saeima with eight deputies (out of whom three were women) was well-known as a “women’s party”. For one period this party had joined the ruling coalition and one woman deputy became a Minister of Economy – though for a short while. Another party member despite the following split of the party remained the Executive Secretary of the Presidium of the Parliament. After the split of a party the newly founded fraction – New Fraction – remained in the opposition, but the remaining three persons managed to establish a new party and joined the ruling coalition though were not able to form a fraction (the necessary minimum required to form a fraction is four deputies). The Social Democratic Union follows the general party guidelines of women’s recruitment in the second half of 90-ties – the women-newcomers in politics are accepted only if they have publicity and thus can ensure additional votes during elections.

The level of women’s representation in all the other “old” ruling parties’ fractions has remained approximately the same – around one fifth of all the deputies.

*Table 2*

**The Gender Structure of the 7<sup>th</sup> Saeima of Latvia**  
(November 2001)

No	Title of the Fraction	Number of deputies	Number of women deputies	% of women deputies
1.	People’s Party	24	8	30
2.	Latvian Way	21	4	19
3.	Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK	17	3	18
4.	New Christian Party*	3	1	30
5.	Latvian Social-Democratic Union	14	3	21
6.	New Fraction	5	2	40
7.	For Equal Rights in United Latvia	16	-	-
	Together	100	21	21

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\* New Christian party having only three deputies in the parliament is not entitled to form a fraction. Formally it is a group of deputies.

- Source:
1. Deputies of the 7<sup>th</sup> Saeima.  
[http://www.saeima.lv/cgi/izdrukas\\_dep\\_saraksts](http://www.saeima.lv/cgi/izdrukas_dep_saraksts).
  2. Statistical Yearbook of Latvia.2000. Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. Riga.2000, p.192

The level of the representation in different parties can be explained also by the inner recruitment rules in parties forming the deputy candidates' lists, which are very much alike in all of them. On average there are 30-40 per cent women members in parties. The average percentage of women's entrances in the party lists is around 20 –25 percent of all the candidates. The number of candidates on the lists do not exceed 40-65 persons, but usually first women entrances could be found between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> places and further which means they are put in the 'risk zone', not to say more. Exceptions are rare and mainly concern the women who are popular as politicians or newcomers from other fields with extremely high popularity rating (e.g. TV journalists, actresses). Usually these are just those women who help the party to overcome the entrance barrier. Consequently they enter the parliament.

The second threshold which women candidates have to overcome is connected with the attitude of the electorate. According to the electoral legislation in Latvia the candidates' lists are transferable – voters can influence the final outcome putting pluses and minuses opposite the family name of the candidate and thus shifting the candidate up and down the list. The usual outcome is such that majority of women candidates usually found themselves even lower than the party lists initially proposed them to be. It is not difficult to notice than even in the framework of this model there are exceptions like For Equal Rights in United Latvia which had 12 women candidates on the lists before the elections to the 7<sup>th</sup> Saeima, but none entered the parliament. The explanation could be that the electorate of this party is subjected to the patriarchal values even to a greater extent than the electorate of other parties. Voters prefer male candidates because they are identified as resource holders which women are not and consequently are regarded as powerless by definition even when are elected to the highest power offices. Leaving aside for a while the question what causes this

phenomenon, let us look more carefully at the empowerment possibilities for those women deputies who are inside the parliament.

There are sixteen committees and eleven subcommittees in the 7<sup>th</sup> Saeima of Latvia. Women deputies are represented in all of the committees except Administrative Committee. But there are only three committees where they are in the position of the chairmen: that of the Committee of Mandate and Submissions, Committee for Citizenship Law Implementation and Social and Employment Committee. In four committees women were elected the chairmen's deputies. These are the Committee for Citizenship Law Implementation, Committee for Human Rights and Public Affairs, Committee for European Affairs, Economic, Agricultural, Environmental and Regional Development committees. There is one committee – State Administration and Local Governments Committee where a woman deputy is a secretary of the committee.

These facts speak for themselves: women are in a formal power position within the Parliament only in those committees which formally control the rights, not the finances and material resources.

There is a range of committees where there is only one woman deputy as a member – those of Defense and Internal Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Budget and Finances, Mandate and Submissions, National Security and Economic, Agricultural, Environmental and Regional Development.<sup>2</sup> Almost all of them are the so-called resources controlling committees having genuine power and decision-making force.

The division of power inside the committees also reveals the same pattern though at first glance it is logical that women everywhere are in minority as there are much less women deputies in the Saeima in general. If there is more than one woman, then there are usually 30–40 per cent of them. But in no committee do women comprise the majority.

At the same time during the functioning of the last two parliaments – the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> – female deputies were empowered more than previously. But – and it is peculiar for this, in general positive,

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<sup>2</sup> Deputies of the 7<sup>th</sup> Saeima.

[http://www.saeima.lv/cgi/izdrukas.dep\\_saraksts](http://www.saeima.lv/cgi/izdrukas.dep_saraksts)

**Women Members of the Cabinet of Ministers in Latvia  
(1990 – 2001)**

Parliament	Prime Minister	No. of Women among Ministers	No. of Women among State Ministers
The Supreme Council of Latvia (1990-1993)	I.Godmanis (1990 –1993)	-	-
5 <sup>th</sup> Saeima (1993-1995)	V.Birkavs (1993-1994)	-	-
	M.Gailis (1994-1995)	2	1
6 <sup>th</sup> Saeima (1995-1998)	A.Šķēle (1995, Dec – 1997, Jan)	-	2
	A.Šķēle (1997, Jan – 1997 Aug.)	-	-
	G.Krasts (1997, Sept – 1998, Nov)	1	1
7 <sup>th</sup> Saeima (1998 –2002)	V.Krištopāns (1998, Nov. – 1999, Jun)	2	2
	A.Šķēle (1999, July – 2000, April)	1	-
	A.Bērziņš (since 2000, May)	2	-

Source: Latvija 1985-1996.gadā. Notikumu hronika. (Latvia in 1985-1996. Chronicle of Events). – Demokrātijas attīstības centrs N.I.M.S. Rīga, 1996, p.105-112.

Diena, 1998, 26.nov. p.6., Diena, 1999, 14.jūlijs, p.3, Diena, 2000, 6.maijs, p.3

tendency – only for a relatively short period of time. Why? It seems that their election, for instance, to the position of a Chairman of the Parliament, had been a compromise decision for a majority of male deputies. After the compromise formula have been found, women are pressed to leave the position – often in the result of a kind of impeachment. (For instance, in the result of inner party conflicts Democratic Party *Saimnieks* refused to support their representative – a woman deputy – to continue to hold the position of the Chairman of the Parliament.) Typical example of such compromise electoral outcome was the election of a woman as President of Latvia by the Parliament in 1999 thus making Latvia the only post-communist country where a woman is the president of the state.

Another explanation of this tendency could be the fact that the main dimension of the power realisation – that of the distribution of the state resources named privatization – is approaching its *Endspiele*. It means that the majority of the objects of privatisation – and possibly the most valuable ones – have already been privatised. The remaining ones are natural resources or former state monopolies such as shipyards, railways etc, privatisation of which cannot be realized behind closed doors, among the small group of interested persons.

Which means that the control of the process via political means loses its significance. The male actors gradually leave the scene to use the fruits of the 'hard privatization labor' and activate themselves in more reproductive fields. Women are allowed to occupy the positions and cope with rather limited means to manage the state administration. The best example is the ever growing number and percentage of women elected as members of local governments. More than a half of local deputies were women – 63 per cent elected in 1997.<sup>3</sup> Taking into account the relatively small compensation (wages) – for the bureaucracy of the local governments, it is more than understandable. These examples leave little place for doubt whether the power distribution in the power space is determined by the gender dimension. It is even more noticeable examining the composition of the Cabinets of Ministers from the gender point of view.

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<sup>3</sup> Statistical Yearbook of Latvia, 2000. Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. Riga 2000, p.192.

The size of the cabinet has greatly differed during the decade – from 25 members during the first years of the independence till 12–15 members of the cabinet in the end of the 90-ties. The average durability of the cabinet has been around ten months. The only exceptions are the first and the last cabinets. In spite of this, the numbers of female cabinet members has also increased from none till two ministers in the fields of culture and education or culture and justice. The other fields where women sometimes appear as state ministers are those of environment and tax revenue.

Unequal access to decision-making results in the differentiated and polarised resource distribution in the society in general. True, these problems during the last years have got more publicity, but meanwhile the vicious circle of power and resource distribution (women have no resources to get empowered more, but lacking genuine decision-making power they cannot get access to resources that can help them conquer the power) becomes even tighter as the income polarisation along the gender line increases. For instance, monthly average gross wage and salary for males and females in 1995 were 93, – lats (158,-Euro) and 73 lats (124,0 Euro) respectively, but in 1999 it was already – 148 lats (251,-Euro) for males and 118 lats (200,-Euro) for females.<sup>4</sup> Who can break the vicious circle? The choice – even purely theoretical – is not very large. Among the most powerful agents could be mentioned three – media, society and the state.

### **Breaking the vicious circle. Media**

Changing economic, social and cultural environment could not but influence the changes of the perception of gender roles and identity. On the other hand, apart from economic, cultural and institutional determinants, ruling stereotypes can influence the perception of the gender roles too and to a greater extent than it could be imagined at first.

The models of stereotyping in post-communist societies, developing

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<sup>4</sup> Statistical Yearbook of Latvia.2000. Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. Riga 2000, p. 69.

in a controversial environment, have themselves become rather complicated and contradictory. According to a rather standardised presumption, classical patriarchal stereotypes of the gender roles rule in the post-socialist societies. That means that males are perceived as professionals, bread-winners and financial caretakers of their families, but women are taking care of their families, husbands and homes as wives and mothers.

Is it really so? What are the basic value orientations in this respect in our society? And what impact do they have on the perception of women in politics? Comparative analyses of the Soviet and post-Soviet press witness about certain essential changes during the last two decades in the narratives of mass media. Already in the Soviet period it came out quite clearly that the model of gender-state relations as the dominant model in comparison with the possible alternative of certain individualism – had modifications. First of all, no model proposed classical patriarchy. Some of the media proposed total male dominance in the family in combination with absolute and primary men's service to the state, but at the same time suggesting female participation as productive state employees too. Which meant that a woman was supposed to carry double burden – as a state employee and as a men's servant in the family. Some media suggested that women should be solely the servants of the state, giving up their personal life for the sake of the state. Yet some other – that personal happiness could be achieved via common family service to the state.<sup>5</sup>

In a word – gender identity was regarded as achievable solely through the service to the state. All the modifications accepted active female involvement in state affairs, but, according to unwritten rules of the organisation of public governance under the totalitarian regime at that time, the decision-making level was – with rare exceptions – practically excluded.

It seems that this gender identity legacy is still having its partial impact – at least in the sphere of gender imaging – in the media now – ten years after the transition began.

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<sup>5</sup> I. Tartakovskaya, 'The Changing Representation of Gender Roles in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Press' (see above, footnote 1).

No wonder, if we take into account that the imagery and language of mediated politics are regarded as gendered, supporting male as a norm in the Western media too. The concept of gendered mediation is a new phase in the study of women, politics and media which was activated thanks to the fact that more women appeared on the Western political stage as political leaders of their parties.<sup>6</sup> This could be regarded as a coincidence, but this is also the fact of Latvian political life. Out of six fractions in the Parliament of Latvia three are headed by female deputies which means that they occupy the leading positions in the respective parties though there is no party where the top leader is a woman. What is the nature of political and social gender imaging in the case of Latvia?

Two most popular and respected printed media were chosen for analysis: the newspaper *Diena* (Day) – a morning newspaper, Latvian equivalent of the British *Times*, and the magazine *Rīgas Laiks* (Riga Time) – regarded as a kind of analogue of the US-based *Time*. Both are liberal, center-right editions, respected among politicians, intellectuals and business circles. Both are regarded as top leaders in their genre and consequently as opinion makers as well. They were chosen also because of one more substantial reason – both are headed by women editors.

*Diena* is a daily newspaper with different supplements every day. Three columns from Saturday's supplement were used – "Saturday's Saloon", "Portraits" and "Private Life". Issues from November 2000 till May 2001 were analysed from two points of view: the models of choice of persons for publicity and the textual and photo material.<sup>7</sup>

Politics is reflected in Latvian media in a highly personalized way. The portraits – verbalized descriptions and pictures of V.I.P. persons – reflect ruling stereotypes of gender roles in politics – most often according to the classical patriarchal value system.

All three columns in Saturday's supplement present portraits of

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<sup>6</sup> E. Gidengil, J. Everitt, 'Metaphors and Misrepresentation', in: Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics, Winter 99, Vol.4, Issue 1, p.48 – 66.

<sup>7</sup> *SestDiena*. Laikraksta *Diena* pielikums. 2000, novembris, decembris. 2001, janvāris – aprīlis.

chosen persons. 'Saturday's Saloon' and 'Private Life' uses the genre of interviewing, but "Portraits" – description-analyses. 'Saturday Saloon' is the column where the so called "positive" interviews take place – the journalist openly favors the 'object', admits his positive sides of character and his professional contribution to the society.

Out of 25 interviewed persons during six months only one was a politician. Usual 'clients' of the column are "professionals" with the help of whom newspaper creates the image of the positive hero of the transitional Latvia. They are, as a rule, representatives of the middle class, intellectuals. But all of them have one thing in common – they all are 'winners'. Appearing on the pages of the newspaper they represent the ideal of energetic individual who radiate the positive energy and whose success is the result of their own work. During the half of a year only five of those chosen were women. Thus in 20 per cent of cases women could contribute to the image of professional women in our society: one retired actress, a translator of fiction, one desk officer and two businesswomen. Among 80 per cent of men there were sportsmen, physicians, artists, journalists, a stage director, an architect, a clergyman etc. Not all of them were celebrities, most often – only interesting personalities with valuable opinions. The leading idea in almost all of these interviews is that the success is deserved and is based on hard work, it depends on individual's own determination. No interference of the state is possible or even imaginable.

But the conclusion could be made that positive emotions in the society can be connected with professional men almost in all of the professions, leaving women in the periphery of their chosen activities. What is the reason? Did the newspaper have difficulties finding women professionals who would also be personalities? Or does the targeted market audience consist of male professionals? In any case, the newspaper contributes to the reproduction of patriarchal stereotypes which are widely propagated among males about women's social role in our state at the moment, which is "to stay on the periphery".

Next column, 'Portrait', is the place meant for 'bad boys and girls' – in the interpretation of the newspaper, of course. True, the criticism

is not always equally addressed to everybody in spite of the fact that most often the visitors of the column are those who have caused – according to the journalists – some scandal. Actually politicians have monopolised the column. Out of eighteen males analysed during the six months 12 or almost 70 per cent are politicians or representatives of other professions who have some relations to the political power. In general the attitude is critical. Usually the material about the person in question is compiled on the basis of opinions about them among friends, co-workers, competitors, even anonymous gossipers. Negativism prevails. A central idea that the materials in the column promote is the discreditation of those who can negatively influence the development of the liberal political course.

Consequently women's representation here is extremely small – four women or 18 per cent. Out of them one was the director of the organisational bureau “Riga-800”, responsible for the organisation of the celebration festivities, a Latvian writer – possibly the most popular in Latvia – and two women connected with politics more closely – Mrs. Clinton and Mrs. Bush (senior). The choice of the personalities confirms again that the women in Latvia are practically out of the political power sphere and from this point of view do not deserve even criticism.

The third column is called ‘Private Life’. The content of interviews corresponds to its title and in a rather impudent way provokes the interviewed to disclose different sides of their life usually not exposed to larger public. But the choice of the persons interviewed from gender point of view is done according to another pattern: more than 80 per cent are women. Men are represented by two representatives of former Latvian emigrés now living in Latvia who describe their experience of adopting to the post-communist reality. Added are one young pop singer and a businessman who was interviewed in connection with his and his wife's age gap.

Women guests of the column are professionals: entrepreneurs, actresses, two politicians, a playwright, an artist, a journalist, a student, a composer and others. The common message of the newspaper is quite clear: these women are not so interesting with

their professional as with their private life, but in order to get their private life attractive they have to have success in their profession. In spite of the last, women's social and economic input cannot be regarded as important, private life is what matters as long as it concerns females. Even in cases when there is no private life at all as it was revealed in some materials.

The newspaper clearly advertises the post-communist female identity and role model – combination of private life (which is of primary value) and professional success (which is of less or no significance, but is obligatory). It concerns also women politicians, thus sending the readers a quite definite message – even the political career does not save a woman from being regarded as a failure if there is no private life. Otherwise all of the interviewed women professionals could become the guests of the first column as well as men's emotional life and other problems apart from the professional ones could be regarded as important enough to be discussed in the third column.

Can the ideology of the newspaper be regarded as an invitation for women to give up their professional life and the possibility to influence the decisions that influence their own life thus becoming dependent financially and socially? The materials published in the newspaper do not allow to come to other conclusions.

In the magazine *Rigas Laiks*, pictures (photos published during the six months, November 2000 – April 2001) were analyzed.<sup>8</sup> Out of 326 pictures 73 per cent told about the best qualities of men. Photo coverage told the readers about athletic, competitive males who additionally had the analytical mind (added interviews really were of good quality and witnessed about it). Judging from the those pictures males comprise three thirds of the society thus justifying male dominance in all social spheres, political including. In 14 per cent of cases women appear on the pages of journal as men's escorts and only in 13 per cent of cases as independent objects of interviews: What professions are represented? A fashion designer, a ballet dancer, a writer, a businesswoman, a journalist – in a word, professionals. But the attitude towards them best of all is characterised by the titles which

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<sup>8</sup> *Rigas Laiks*, 2000, No 11-12, 2001, No 1 – 4.

are often as follows – Veidemane's Lifelong Men, Pulkinen's Shops, Speniece Eats. Slightly despicable intonation in the interviews, titles and the material itself again leaves the impression that any activities connected with a woman are not serious and cannot be regarded as such, except those which are connected either with men, consumerism, or with natural biological demands.

Such materials, intonation and value orientation are proposed by the media despite the fact that women comprise the majority in Latvia: there are 53,7 per cent women and 46,3 per cent men.<sup>9</sup> Additionally the percentage of persons with higher education is greater among women than among men. In the age group 19 – 23 years 71 per cent of all women were with higher education, but only 40 per cent of men in 1999.<sup>10</sup>

Why do media create such a common image of females and males? One possibility is that those working in media are themselves overwhelmed with patriarchal stereotypes and are not able to interpret the reality (which actually differs from the imaging on the pages of these media) according to the real discourse. The other possibility is that those who finance the editions demand to realise the policy which is usually called the reproduction of the classical gender role stereotypes, but in reality means the 'manufacturing of consent' (N.Chomsky). In any case the gender imaging in media serves as a mean to indoctrinate patriarchal hierarchy as a norm. But what is the response of the society and the state?

### **Breaking the vicious circle. Society**

Society in Latvia is extremely heterogeneous and polarised from many points of view: ethnically, politically, economically, culturally. Separate social groups (for instance Latvians and non-Latvians) are polarised inside themselves – not less than the whole society in general. The changes concerning the gender roles also have taken place during the last ten years and are reflected in the fiction

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<sup>9</sup> Statistical Yearbook of Latvia. 2000. Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, Riga 2000, p.40.

<sup>10</sup> Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2001.

literature more to the point than elsewhere. First of all women's community has become more fragmented.

Polarisation of views concerning post-socialist women's place and role in the society is a phenomenon not admitted at once.<sup>11</sup> The understanding of the inevitability of changing female identity contours is not spread all over the society. Part of women in Latvia are ready to meet and accept the imported post-modern views on gender roles, part defends the well-known realm of submissiveness to men with all the means at their disposal. The reason is the deficit of males – the phenomenon of the so-called “women's society”. It appears first of all in demasculinisation of young males in families (which are too often one parent families) and schools (where females are teachers in overwhelming majority). Young males are accustomed since the childhood to a situations where females serve them (at school they get better marks for equal or even worse done job) and at the same time take the responsibility for family's well being. The only demand to men is to exist, to be near and to allow to be served. The situation repeats itself on the level of individual couples also later and even there, where women understand the function of the mechanism of patriarchal discourse. Thus even the moral code of classical patriarchy (dominate, but take the responsibility) which is propagated in media is not reproduced on a large scale. Instead of it there is a dominance, but without much responsibility.

As the tendency develops, the reproductiveness in Latvia decreases – in the situation of prolonged economic crises, low level of living standards and rising price of the entrance ticket to the socially valued female strata, women find themselves in a situation of limited possibilities to cope with double demands of responsibility.

Women's NGOs do exist. In the NGO center in the capital of Latvia there are registered 29 organizations which have indicated that one of the spheres of their activities is women, but in reality only 11 of them are well known as connected with some women's issues. And even in that case their primary concern is not to change the gender roles in the society, but to soften the consequences of the existing income

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<sup>11</sup> Feministica Lettica, Rīga 1999; Feministica Lettica, Rīga 2001.

polarisation along the gender dimension – social welfare, aid to the socially handicapped. Gender equality issue as a problem which has its reason and consequences is not on the regular agenda at all.

### **Breaking the Vicious Circle. The State**

At the same time the understanding of the necessity to ensure the national social and economic development in the most effective way does exist in the male dominated Latvia. To a great extent this is so thanks to the Western input: economic, ideological, cultural. The problems, concerning gender equality are not exclusive. In November 2001, the cabinet of Ministers accepted the Conception of the Realization of the Gender Equality – though without financial backing – which was elaborated during a rather prolonged period of time by the Ministry of Welfare. Nevertheless different governmental institutions were given the order to provide further preparation steps in order to enliven the conception during next years.

The main goal of the conception is to promote the coordinated, effective and integrated gender equality development. Among the tasks of the conception the following are mentioned as the main: to mark the priority problems in the field of gender equality and to mark the framework of the responsibility of the state institutions to solve the problems in the most effective way. In reality it means the introduction of the special institution to cope with the goal practically, but it was denied by the Cabinet of Ministers as there are no finances for it.. The planned educational programme remained on the agenda as well as different legal acts necessary to introduce in order to push forward the program on the bases of the existing state institutions.

It seems that the forthcoming enlargement of the EU can surprise all the players unprepared as concerns the gender issues. It can seem unbelievable, but only a very narrow circle of specialists have heard up to now about Gender Mainstreaming. Three basic players – media, state and society as if play different and even contradicting tunes of the same gender identity song. It seems this could be regarded as the basic reason why the gender identity is in a flux, women's social and economic role in general is getting

deteriorated, only women's political participation façade gets formally a bit polished. But maybe there can appear the fourth player on the scene – that of the EU enlargement process?

The concept of gender mainstreaming, adopted by the EU Commission in 1996, seems promising. It calls for the systematic incorporation of gender issues throughout all governmental institutions and policies.<sup>12</sup> It implies promoting equality between women and men at all the stages – planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation – of the of policy courses, not only securing of equal opportunities in the workplace.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time skeptic voices are heard as concerns the impact of EU gender policies. First, there do exist apparent “weakness” of translating EU policies into national policies.<sup>14</sup> Second, existing gender mainstreaming policy in reality reconstructs the existing relations between private and public spheres and as a consequence the gender relations change from dependency to individualisation for both sexes. As a result of it the formal equality of genders is reached, but at the same time it leaves women more unprotected in the private sphere of their activities, for instance, as concerns child rearing.<sup>15</sup>

Both objections are relevant for the situation in Latvia. Gender mainstreaming program is known in Latvia among the bureaucracy of international organisations, but five years after it was adopted by EU it still has not become a discussed issue in media or among the larger public in Latvia.

As concerns the individualisation of both sexes, then the result of the policy is a picture very well known – it reminds and possibly replicates the situation in the former USSR. The result of it was already discussed in the article above. In any case it seems at the moment that the eventual influence of the EU on the development of gender identity in Latvia can be regarded as contradictory.

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<sup>12</sup> M.A. Pollack, E. Hafner-Burton, 'Mainstreaming Gender in the European Union', in: *Journal of European Public Policy*, 2000, 7:3 Special Issue, pp.432 – 456.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> B.Young, 'Disciplinary Neoliberalism in the in the European Union and Gender Politics', in: *New Political Economy*, 2000, March, Vol. 5, Issue 1, p.98.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 77-99.