

What the European Union is and is not in terms of Women's Human Rights?

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Abstract

The European Union sees gender equality as a necessity towards an inclusive democracy and aims at promoting the participation and representation of both men and women within the economy, in decision-making and in social, cultural and civil life. Though the existing legal base states that the promotion of equal rights between men and women is important, it does not restrict or specify situations, hence leaving it open for interpretation (Gender Mainstreaming, Article 2 of the EC treaty). By not specifying the areas in which the gender equality should be promoted, the Union works on its implementation in the areas where they think is important, and they are as follows: a) developing strategies to encourage gender mainstreaming in all policies which have an impact on the place of women in the economy, b) measuring and implementing gender balance in political decision making and improving gender balance in economic and social decision making, c) improving gender balance in the Commission, d) promoting equal access to full employment and social rights for all, and so on. The objective of this gender mainstreaming and the gender equality proposal has been fully economical, that is to develop strategies to encourage gender mainstreaming in all policies which have an impact on the place of women in the economy. Hence the policies within the European Union disregards women and women's identity but sees women as a unit connected to the market economy. The European Union's agenda excludes most of women's lives in particular, the complexity of the connections between family work, welfare and the labor market. Hence by limiting the rights of women to the labor market –that is the economic environment—it leaves the questions of sexual abuse, violence, against

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women, access to health care and abortion, and many other essential issues, connected to women's identity, out. Here, I aim to first look at what the European Union is and is not in terms of gender and gender equality, what it has done so far for promoting women's human rights. Since strengthening civic participation on the local level as well as international level is an important step for fostering women's full participation as well as for a full-fledged democracy and since non-governmental institutions have become essential sources of information on urban conditions, and trends and effective interlocutors for 'vulnerable', 'voiceless' people, excluded, populations later in my paper I will turn my focus to the women's agencies and explain how women's groups use their identity and difference as a tool for lobbying in order to create policy change in return that embraces men and women as equals. In other words, here I will try to explain whether the EU as a supranational institution somehow sensitive to women's issues can be used as a tool by women's groups in their lobbying strategies and pointing out their differences and making these differences acknowledged. In order to understand what lobbying is and how women's agencies use their difference, and unacknowledged identities as a tool to empower women, strengthen their abilities to create change both at the national and supranational context first an EU-NGO European women's lobby and a member state, Greece, has been selected as the case study.

Keywords: European Union; Women's Rights; Democracy; Economy; Gender Equality.

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