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## EDITORIAL: Differences in the framing gender inequality as a policy problem across Europe

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EDITORIAL: DIFFERENCES IN THE FRAMING  
OF GENDER INEQUALITY AS A POLICY  
PROBLEM ACROSS EUROPE

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This volume is a compilation of a variety of contributions representing different stages in the work of the MAGEEQ group, as well as different aspects of the problematique that guided the above research project. There are two leading questions in this volume. One question that all contributions try to confront refers to what is represented as gender equality, and how gender inequality is framed as a policy problem in Europe. The second issue regards theory and methodology, and addresses the question if and how the discursive dimension of policies can be analysed in terms of gendered power relationships. MAGEEQ analyzes current European policy realities and asks: *What is implied when gender equality or similar concepts are used? What is the meaning of «gender equality» in these policies?* The data used encompass six European countries and the EU itself. The set of countries includes the West, the East, and the South; included are the Netherlands and Austria, Greece and Spain, Slovenia and Hungary. The period covered is the period after the World Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995-2004. This volume presents not only a first analysis of the data gathered, but also two critical reflections on the work done so far. In this sense, the volume reflects «work in progress» rather than a set of final reports. In presenting their work at this stage, including some of the discussions within the group of researchers, the authors hope to contribute to ongoing debates on gender equality policies in Europe as well as on the possibilities and pitfalls of comparative frame analysis.

While gender equality policies in Europe have developed into a configuration of very different policies, and while significant debates are actually taking place on the strengths and weaknesses of various strategies (such as anti-discrimination, positive action or affirmative action and gender

mainstreaming), MAGEEQ wishes to investigate what is usually taken for granted, and thus not investigated: What is gender equality? How do various policies frame the issue, often in a non overt manner contributing in this way to the structuring of gender inequality in a specific manner while intending to fight against it? How do various frames in respect to the issue differentiate different European national realities, and what is their potential to contribute to the differences concerning the success of gender policies?

In the first article of the volume Verloo concentrates on theory and methodology, and thus presents the problematique of the whole MAGEEQ research project. To study «What is the meaning of gender equality in European policies?», this project treats the concept of gender equality as an empty signifier. The concept of frames and framing is presented as a basic concept for the analysis, starting with defining a frame as an interpretation scheme that structures the meaning of reality, and a policy frame as an organizing principle that transforms fragmentary or incidental information into a structured and meaningful policy problem, in which a solution is implicitly or explicitly enclosed. Policy framing then can be seen as the process of constructing, adapting and negotiating policy frames. The article presents a conceptual framework for the comparison of policy frames on gender (in)equality that combines elements from social movement theory, policy theory, discourse analysis and gender theory. Based on social movement and policy theory, a policy frame is further specified as a specific configuration of positions on the dimensions of diagnosis and prognosis of the policy problem, roles attributed in diagnosis and prognosis and voice given. Based on gender theory, a policy frame on gender equality is defined as a specific configuration of positions on these dimensions as articulated in terms of gender dimensions, gender structures, gender mechanisms and intersectionality. Because not only discursive elements but also attributed roles and voice have an important place in this framework, the approach is labelled «critical frame analysis».

Four articles in this volume represent comparative thematic contributions that have been presented at the Second Pan-European Conference on EU Politics of the ECPR Standing Group on the European Union, in Bologna, June 24-26, 2004. The first, titled *Gender mainstreaming and the bench marking fallacy of women in political decision-making* deals with the panoply of measures considered and implemented in view of a balanced fe/male participation in political decision- making (parity clauses, gender quota, the revision of electoral systems, etc.). Meier, Bustelo, Lombardo, and Pantelidou Maloutas study a selection of European cases (Netherlands,

Spain, Greece, and European Union) where such measures have been debated and possibly adopted. Regardless of the individual outcomes, the central focus is on the framing of the issues, relying on the working method as developed by the research network on «policy frames and implementation problems: the case of gender mainstreaming» (MAGEEQ). Studying the analysis of the problem's diagnosis and prognosis, with special attention being paid to normative concerns, allows for more precise insights in the potential of explicitly gendered topics for a gender mainstreaming approach. The underlying argument is that not so much the topics as such but their framing determine the potential for a successful gender mainstreaming process.

In *Domestic violence: Shifting boundaries between the public and the private?* van Lamoen, Kriszan and Paantjens focus on differences and similarities in the ways in which actors at national and EU level –including politicians, civil servants, and NGOs– tend to frame domestic violence as a public problem. Which arguments play(ed) a role in the process of politicising violence in the private realm? To what extent are gender inequalities and related mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion considered in the representation of the problem? Countries as different as Hungary, the Netherlands, and Spain seem to have one thing in common: the articulation of domestic violence as a public matter coincides with new modes of strategic framing, in which gender inequalities become invisible or distorted against the background of other policy concerns. At the same time, differences seem to exist in terms of the way in which the topic is framed, depending on the policy sector in which it is located –ranging from crime and security policies to the realm of public health– and the way in which the problem is demarcated. While some governments focus on violence in all possible dependency relations –including social homes– others more exclusively concentrate on violence within families. The paper uses the data collected in the MAGEEQ project, and juxtaposes differences and similarities at the national level to policies and guidelines at EU level, including gender mainstreaming initiatives.

In *Framing prostitution policies. A comparison of Slovenia and Austria* Hrzenjak, Jalusic, Sauer, and Tertinegg focus on the similarities and differences in gender equality policies in Austria and Slovenia concerning prostitution and trafficking in women. The latter are viewed not only as salient issues for gender equality but also as «hot» issues due to the rise of organised crime. The target of this paper is to explore in which symbolic and concrete ways the liberal, social democratic and catholic frames influence the

policy making on sex work, as well as the ways in which these frames refer to gender equality and gender mainstreaming. A specific comparison is undertaken between the two neighbouring countries which have many elements of historic, cultural and religious tradition in common but which differ in institutional political settings and policy environments. It is expected that due to cultural similarities specific concepts on prostitution and gender equality have many common features. However, differences in the political system and in the traditions of policy making towards gender equality presented a different environment. Political frames referring to prostitution in Slovenia and Austria since the mid nineties have been analysed, while frames of gendering and degendering prostitution in policy debates as well as images of women and men are pinpointed and studied, in reference to the catholic, liberal and social democratic frames in both countries.

Verloo, Maratou-Alipranti, Tertinegg, and van Beveren note in *Framing the organization of intimacy as a gender inequality problem in Europe*, that for the EU the reconciliation of work and family life has been an important issue, but as a policy issue it has been as much about achieving other policy goals such as labour market and the protection of children as it has been about gender equality. In some European states this issue is framed not only in terms of facilitation of labour market participation but also as an issue that is related to demographic problems. It comes as no surprise then that the analysis of policy frames on family policy in connection with gender reveals competing frames, at the national level as well as on the EU level. This paper uses the (preliminary) results of the MAGEEQ project to concentrate on differences in national and European policies that focus on facilitating parenthood, sharing parental responsibilities between women and men, or on the reconciliation of work and family life. It becomes clear that –even if the connection to gender mainstreaming is rarely made– this particular part of gender equality policies gets captured easily into other policy frames. Moreover, the analysis reveals many contradictory frames around these issues, including various feminist frames as well as gender stereotypes and gender bias. Differences in the framing of the organisation of intimacy as a gender equality problem in Europe are analysed in relation to the changing political balances of power in European nations and the European Union.

Next to these four papers that have been presented originally as paper for the Bologna Conference, this volume contains three more papers that are using MAGEEQ material, and that concentrate predominantly on Greece.

Pantelidou Maloutas in her article titled *Comparing frames, framing comparisons: Greece/EU frames on gender inequality in politics*, zooms in more precisely on a comparison of the issue between Greece and the European Union. She presents the main similarities and differences between Greece and the EU in respect to the framing of gender inequality in political decision making as a policy issue, based mainly on the ways that the problem is diagnosed. She notes that comparing frames relative to gender inequality in political decision making between Greece and the EU presents an image of expected similarities and differences. However, both similarities and differences have internal elements that respectively show divergence within similarity and homogeneity within difference, elements not always of minor importance. She also aims at the formulation of a hypothesis concerning the fact that beyond similarities and differences, which may tint in a different colour measures and policies showing one case more gender sensitive or more «traditional» than the other, there exists one basic, primary, underlying similarity, relative to the conceptualisation of the notion of gender it-self, which frames all gender related policies. A framing of capital importance, since the way gender is conceptualised is determining for the degree to which the promoted policies are disruptive or legitimating in the end, of the existing gender order.

Thanopoulou and Tsiganou, in *Representations of gender in public rhetoric. The case of law-making on immigration in the Greek parliament*, investigate law-making on immigration in Greece, through the examination of the relevant parliamentary debates. They argue that the analysis of the debate on a single legal provision concerning the issuing of work permits to foreign artists, is proven very fertile for understanding the ways social representations on gender are implicated in public rhetoric. As it appears, gender stereotypes emerge strongly even in social issues publicly debated in «neutral» terms, while their strength is evidenced by the fact that they are very similar, regardless of the political identity of their bearer.

Hadjiyanni and Kamoutsi, in their article on the *Dimensions of public debate on sexual violence against women: Similarities and differences between Greece and EU policy framing*, aim at a critical analysis of Greek public discourse concerning various forms of sexual violence, as presented mainly in parliamentary discussions. Using the MAGEEQ methodology and documents analysed in this project, they investigate the way in which various social actors define gender and make it apparent (or not) within the respective discourse. They examine the framing of specific issues of sexual violence (intra-family violence and trafficking) as well. An additional objective is to highlight the

differences and similarities in the conceptualisation of these forms of sexual violence between EU policy texts and the Greek case.

As the analysis of MAGEEQ data showed that the methodology used offers a wealth of material for analysis, we have taken up the occasion to submit our papers and methodology to critical comments from other leading scholars in the field of (gender equality) policy analysis.

Bacchi, in her article on *The MAGEEQ project: Identifying contesting meanings of gender equality*, examines the theoretical concepts upon which the MAGEEQ methodology is built. More particularly, she questions the extent to which the concept of framing implies assumptions of intentionality. In order to avoid such connotation, she argues in favour of a distinction between «category politics» (the intentional deployment of concepts and categories for political purposes) and «problem representations» (understandings that are lodged deeply within actors' perceptions). More generally, she calls for a clarification of the concept of framing. Additionally, she addresses the dimension of subjectivity as constructed by problem representations. In her opinion, and while she values the MAGEEQ methodology, analyzing how specific problem representations constitute political subjects and thereby have an impact on the self-perceptions of subjects, is a much missed element of the analysis.

Rönblom highlights two other issues that are crucial to the further elaboration of the methodology of critical frame analysis. Her *Challenges in the studies of comparative constructions of gender equality* first of all questions whether the MAGEEQ papers manage to study «gender equality» as an empty signifier, or whether there are implicit assumptions on the «right» gender equality to be found in the papers presented here. She gives examples where such implicit assumptions might be present, and where they have been avoided, and argues in favour of a reflexive analysis that uses an explicit definition of gender equality in order to avoid such blurring of analysis and standpoint, discovery and justification. In the second part of her paper, she reflects on the pitfalls of comparative analysis in general, especially on the positivistic tradition that is characterizing most comparative analysis. Here, she presents a strong argument in favour of contextual analysis, and again stresses the importance of «strong reflexivity».

Both Bacchi and Rönblom offer important questions for the further elaboration of critical frame analysis that will be of benefit for the ongoing analysis, and we are very grateful to both authors for their contributions. Their main points concern the link between framing and intentionality, the

issue of subjectification, the difficulty of separating normative and analytical concepts and the danger of implicit hierarchies in comparative analysis. In this volume we have chosen to present their critical reflections and comments as they are, instead of revising the papers and thanking these authors in a footnote. We have done so because we believe that the issues they raise are of crucial importance to everyone involved in gender and policy analysis. As we share the «longing» for an analysis in terms of power and fully support the necessity of strong reflexivity, we certainly intend to make good use of these comments in the remaining part of the MAGEEQ work. We are also confident that their reflection will be beneficial for other researchers of policies and policy making processes. There are however a few points to add to their comments:

Firstly, concerning the link between framing and intentionality, we contend that our own analysis is not assuming intentionality. Bacchi is right however, in pointing out that the tradition of the concept of framing is rooted in rather voluntaristic theorizing, and therefore we will need to conceptualize more precisely if and when it matters to what extent framing is intentional. Her proposition to differentiate between category politics and problem representations could be a very useful tool in tackling this issue. In the context of the MAGEEQ research project however, where only texts are analyzed and no data are gathered as to the strategies of actors producing these texts, our analysis can necessarily be only at the level of problem representations.

Secondly, concerning the issue of subjectification, we agree with Bacchi that this is again a very important dimension of the impact of policies. To study this adequately however would go beyond the material gathered in our project. The point is well taken though, and in the methodology of critical frame analysis, the material on Voice and on Roles attributed to actors should provide some insights into this matter.

Thirdly, we agree with Rönnblom that it is always difficult to separate normative and analytical concepts. Her proposal for a solution –to use an explicit definition of gender equality for the analysis– is a valid one. Yet, this proposal seems to suggest that there has to be a choice between her proposal and the approach chosen in MAGEEQ, which is to outline various meanings of gender equality by describing them as involving different positions on dimensions such as diagnosis, prognosis, gender etc. We contend that our approach, in contrast to her proposal, allows for multiple analyses in terms of various explicit definitions of gender equality. In this sense, we conclude that her proposal is extremely valuable, but would amend it in the sense that,



next to detailed and systematic descriptions of gender equality policies, we would need a multitude of deeper analyses that involve explicit benchmarks of some «gender equality» as well.

Fourthly, we share Rönnblom's analysis of the problematic roots of comparative analysis and its dangers. Here it is clear to us that her suggestion to link the analysis of texts more closely to an analysis of context is exactly to the point, and we fully intend to find ways to expand the MAGEEQ analysis in this way.

Finally, we express our hopes that this volume will be of use for many researchers, policy makers and activists, and that it will inspire many future projects. Through our website, the team can always be contacted for further information and co-operation.