



National Assembly of Women

What Women Want in Europe

European Manifesto (summary)

This is a Summary of the European Manifesto *What Women Want in Europe* published by the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) European Regional Office in June 2008. The Manifesto is a joint effort by the following organizations: POGO (Cyprus), Federation of Greek Women/ OGE (Greece), Movimento Democratico des Mulheres/MDM (Portugal), Association of Women of the Mediterranean Region (Italy), National Assembly of Women (UK), Women's Union of Russia, Patriotic Front of Women (Turkey), SKV (Sweden), and MFIK (Iceland). Contact NAW for a copy of the full Manifesto.

Representatives from several European countries who attended the WIDF Executive Committee meeting in Rome/Italy in November 2006, also discussed what women want in Europe. They decided to produce a **Manifesto** as a campaigning and awareness raising tool, to build support for the 14th World Congress of the WIDF in Caracas/Venezuela in April 2007, contribute to the discussions during the 50th anniversary year of the EU in 2007, and as a starting point for future work across European borders.

*NAW is affiliated to
which has*

Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)
UNESCO status B
United Nations (ECOSOC) status 1
ILO Special List



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**“Thus women's work is not only a cheap form of labour,
it also cheapens the work of men and for that reason
it is doubly appreciated by the capitalist, who craves profits.”**

Clara Zetkin

Women's struggles all over the world have much in common. Sisters get a raw deal everywhere. But there are also differences. The majority of women in the European Union (EU), with its 27 member states, are better off than many sisters around the world. Yet the gains made by women in the countries of Europe are uneven, often under attack and require constant struggles to safeguard them. International solidarity means that we support each other in the struggle for equality and human dignity.

While the issues addressed in this embryonic manifesto are in no way comprehensive, peace, the environment, work, children and young people, water, reproductive rights, and violence are central to women's lives. We hope this summary gives a flavour of some of the most pressing issues we are working on. We invite sisters in the UK and Europe to work with us, to add to the debates and join the struggles. We welcome comments from anyone around the world.

Peace

Peace and women are closely interlinked. Women's struggles to preserve peace in the world are necessary to preserve life on our planet. The policies of the USA and other imperialist powers including the EU are based on exploitation, oppression, and the violation of fundamental democratic and civil rights. They impose the 'right of the might' at the expense of peace, and are the real cause of instability all over the world. Contrary to the common belief that European countries are committed to dealing peacefully with disputes, the EU claiming that 'enlargement is making the vision of a united and peaceful continent a reality', its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) have followed a rather different agenda. For the first time in the EU's history, European military structures have been created that are parallel to those of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), able to intervene anywhere in the world. Yet recent events clearly show that armies cannot resolve 21st century conflicts.

Women in Europe want

- a foreign policy based on peace and cooperation, respect of sovereignty, non-intervention in the internal affairs of states, cooperation over conflict resolution, respecting international law and the United Nations Charter. We are committed to peace as a fundamental value
- an end to war, military and economic interventions as means of settling international disagreements. Economic and military warfare means poverty, marginalisation, displacement, migration, violence and sexual assault, pain, and loss of human life
- the abandonment of installations of missiles and military installations by NATO directed at Eastern Europe. Europe must reserve its budget resources for the resolution of economic and social problems. We need disarmament, not rearmament
- a policy which will serve the interests of the EU's working people, especially women. Social justice, democracy, civilisation and friendship are only achieved through peace
- an end to imperialist wars and exploitation. We will continue the fight for the right of working people to live in peace.

Saving the planet

Environmental issues and the struggle to save the planet demand worldwide action, international coordination and internationalist actions. Climate change, extreme natural phenomena, depleting natural resources, draught, pollution of water sources, destruction of flora and fauna, the greenhouse effect, food hazards, and misguided urban planning are all the result of the brutal impact by capital and the multinationals on the environment, tolerated by governments. The international capitalistic system, organised on the basis of profit and antagonism, not only exploits people but also the natural environment. Governments spend billions on military armament, while delaying the implementation of international conventions and the imposition of protective measures for the environment on multinational industries. Nuclear weapons and bombs, depleted uranium and the extraction of oil irreparably destroy local environmental systems. If current rates of greenhouse gas emissions continue, we will see a catastrophic rise in global temperature by 2.0-2.8 degrees Celsius by 2030.

Women in Europe want

- immediate, effective measures on climate change to save the planet. Women, biologically tied into the process of life, cannot be absent from this universal struggle
- urgent, significant and decisive, global collective and political action against the multinational monopolies which are responsible for the disasters affecting the planet.

A better present and future for children and young people

Attitudes to children vary greatly in Europe. A UNICEF report published in February 2007 shows that in countries where children's rights are well established and practised, children feel happy and welcomed. In some others, children and young people often feel hopeless, unhappy, and seen as a 'problem'. Policy and public attitudes towards young citizens are often contradictory, with a severely punitive attitude towards youth, 'anti-social' behaviour, teenage parents, and those labelled 'chaotic families' – often meaning single parent families, working class families, and those from some ethnic minority populations. Poverty still plights the lives of millions of children in the EU. Families with disabled children often live in extreme poverty, while in many families, child labour is a necessity. All families need to be guaranteed an adequate income. In some countries, children are put too early into formal education structures at the expense of being allowed to be children, and to have space and time to play. Each family should have access to high quality and affordable childcare, to allow parents to work and to fulfil their potential and lift families out of the poverty trap. The state must provide free public health and education services.

Women in Europe want

- public and social policies concerning children and young people to be based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which should be integrated into domestic legislation in all European countries, and fully implemented
- a children's commissioner/ombudsperson in each nation to act as an independent advocate of children's rights, with powers to effect immediate changes. All new public policy or proposed legislation should include a 'child-impact' statement
- children who are safe and happy, healthy, enjoy economic well-being, have every chance to achieve, make a positive contribution to society, and enjoy a good childhood. They have a right to live in a world without wars, in good, sustainable environments
- gender to be fully considered in all policies. A resolution of the UN's 4th World Conference on Women (1995) states: "measures to protect and promote the human rights of women and girl-children as an integral part of universal human rights must underlie all action"
- the empowerment of, increased respect for, and a democratic voice for children and young people accompanied by good, well-resourced services which holistically support the development of the next generation in the here and now.

Water for all

Water is the foundation of all life. Fresh water is a limited natural resource comprising only 0.5 % of the world's entire water resources. Water scarcity is a known source of conflict and risks to become more so. We must prevent wars fought over water. Insufficient water perpetuates and worsens poverty and its consequences such as women's oppression and infant death rate. More than half the world's population lacks sufficient water for health, hygiene and household purposes. By 2025 the number of people deprived of water will climb to over three billion and areas rich in resources, like the industrialised West will also be affected. Following the United Nations' agreement water as a fundamental right of all people, a strong debate has developed internationally and in the European Union. Only five per cent of the world's waterworks are privately financed. Europe and the United States are exceptions with 25 per cent. Opposition to privatization has grown while at the same time multinational firms strive to obtain control over waterworks and water rights in order to turn these fundamental rights into a commodity.

Women in Europe want

- access to pure water as a basic human right. Water should be safe, accessible and free of charge to everyone
- a legal framework regarding water which ensures the right priorities concerning water protection and use of waterworks should remain public property
- governments to be responsible for securing access to clean water; international cooperation should give the highest priority to the fundamental rights of all people to sufficient water.

Stable and permanent work

The EU has not brought about the equality of women. It exists to benefit the multinationals and the monopolies, governed by the drive to make profits through the "free market" in which competition rules. Women tend to lose out most as capital enforces its power. The EU is heading to become one of the most antagonistic economies, bringing with it intense exploitation, especially of women, and uprooting basic labour rights.

The reforms being advanced aim to abolish full, permanent and secure employment, while social services are increasingly privatised. This is underlined by the 1992 Maastricht Agreement, the subsequent Treaties of Nice and Lisbon, and the Bolkenstein Directive. Women's official unemployment in the EU disguises reality for two reasons: the criteria for women to register are designed to hide their unemployment, and millions of unemployed are not registered. The EU's declared goal is the increase of occupationability, not work. The class substance of its policies

are obvious, and means more women are in part time jobs, victims of the flexible market (flexicurity), in lower-paid jobs, job-sharing, facing prolonged insecurity. All this intensifies women's double oppression.

In addition, there are specific issues relating to prostitution and the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation, both from European countries as well as those countries not affiliated to the EU. Facing this offensive by capital all over Europe, which targets the woman of the working class, and spreads semi- and un-employment from London to Athens, from Berlin to Madrid, the only response is our united national and international struggle. The women's movement must unite with the trade union movement to fight for working people's rights, both men and women.

Women in Europe want

- recognition of the social value of maternity and provision of quality child care
- stable work with labour rights and social security rights,
- incomes to meet contemporary needs, especially the minimum wage
- equal pay for work for equal value
- free time to pursue family, social, cultural and political interests

Reproductive rights

In 1994, at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, governments agreed that sexual and reproductive health and rights, women's empowerment and gender equality should form the core of the global development agenda. Governments reaffirmed the critical importance of sexual and reproductive health to development in 1995 in Beijing, confirming that women's sexual and reproductive rights are human rights and that they are essential for women to exercise their other human rights. Since then, many other UN agreements including human rights treaties have recognized the fundamental importance of guaranteeing women's sexual and reproductive rights and of protecting the health of women and girls.

Some of these rights, especially to abortion, are still not being respected in some European states: either abortion is still regulated too restrictively or is still criminalised. Restrictions often force women into having illegally performed abortions, in health- and even life-threatening circumstances. Since unsafe abortion may result in a threat to the right to life, it is a violation of the right to life, guaranteed by Art. 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Calls for the constitutional protection of unborn life continually resurface, threatening further restrictions on the anti-abortion law which only permits termination of pregnancy to save a woman's life and health, when the foetus is severely deformed or the pregnancy is the result of a crime. Advances in medical technology are being used to seek a reduction in abortion time limits. Constant vigilance and campaigning is necessary. Progress can be made, as the victorious struggle by the Portuguese women illustrates. After a lengthy and difficult campaign spanning dozens of years, the Movimento Democrático de Mulheres played a key role in achieving a vote in February 2007 which opened the door to the decriminalisation of abortions during the first 10 weeks of pregnancy in an authorised health centres. In 2008, the abortion rights campaign in the UK successfully prevented a reduction in abortion time limits.

Women in Europe want

- comprehensive sexual education inside and outside schools, and through regular and easily accessible community actions and programmes
- easy access for women to accurate information, guidance and family planning, and to high-quality women-centred care providers and services, with expertise in reproductive health including providing safe abortion
- prevention of health- and life-threatening abortions as a public health priority; and provision of high-quality services able to cope with complications arising from unsafe abortion
- immediate abolition of any remaining restrictive clauses on reproductive rights, particularly abortion, in current legislation and the immediate abolition of any exceptions and/or reservations made in relation to UN Conventions and the Member States' Treaties of Accession to the EU.

An end to violence

Violence is a social phenomenon, constantly reproduced in exploitative class societies. The perpetuation of the exploitative system results in patriarchal attitudes and unequal relations between women and men, and produces physical and psychological assaults against women with the aim of injuring, degrading, intimidating, and keeping them in check from which the ruling class profits. The sources of violence experienced by many women in the world lie in rising social inequalities, corruption, and in feudal traditions and their capitalist enforcements. Imperialist wars are the main sources of violence against women and children. Their degradation has become a new sign of victory; occupiers rape women and children as one of the occupying acts. In refuge camps women and children are subjected to sexual harassment and physical violence. International trafficking for sexual exploitation is rife, while the sex industry is expanding into one of the biggest and most lucrative industries in the world – another face of

globalisation – aided by the aggressive marketing of the female body in pornography, in advertising and through the internet.

Women in Europe want

- a society free from gender violence, violence against children and any other form of violence, exploitation, oppression, exclusions, discrimination
- protection of women's rights at work, in education, culture and social services, and thus safeguarding their economic independence
- a culture of solidarity and education which supports equal and respectful relationships between women and men, and encourages friendships between people around the world
- an end to the expansion of the sex industry and all forms of pornography, and to the mass media presenting women as sexual objects
- the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on action against trafficking in human beings (2005) and the 2004 European Parliament resolution on strategies to prevent the trafficking of women and children
- the abolition of prostitution as a profession, whether legal or illegal, as prostitution is the ultimate form of the commercialisation and exploitation of women's bodies.

Inspired or intrigued by all of this?

Interested in doing something to transform these wish-lists into reality?

Then don't hesitate.

Get in touch to find out more. Add your voice to those of our sisters in Europe and around the world to create a planet fit for all, through respecting and fighting for the equality of women.

Join the NAW.