

LONG REPORT

RDR What Rights? Women's rights, gender equality and Europe

KATOWICE, 18TH OF JUNE, 2019

Poland is home to some of the most restrictive abortion laws in the European Union. This is not enough for the conservative PiS government that is pushing a law that could totally ban abortion. All this is happening during the official Women Rights Year when Polish women and men should celebrate the women's vote centennial. Instead they march in mass demonstrations to protect their basic rights. In this situation we want to exchange ideas on how to protect women rights and ensure gender equality with liberal partners from Europe.

The Roundtable was organized in Nikiszowiec, an industrial part of Katowice, in the center of the Polish region of Silesia. It took place in a restaurant "Śląska Prohibicja" to make it inclusive, easily accessible for locals.

The event started with introduction by Alina Bednarz from the Women's Congress, the most important Polish women's rights organization that hosts annually a weekend event where the most important issues for women rights are touched upon. Mrs. Bednarz explained shortly the history of Polish feminism, especially from the regional Silesian context, and the struggle that women's organization have had in the last 25 years.

The panel debate was moderated by Ewa Machura from the All-Poland's Women's Strike (OSK).

The first panelist Natalia Klima-Piotrowska, a lawyer and pro bono advocate of a group of teachers who were almost fired from a public school for having participated in the Black Protest (against the full abortion ban) explained how from her perspective the protests and demonstrations changed the Polish people's perception of women's rights. She stressed the aggressive position of the government and incidents like firing protesters, cutting support for pro-choice NGOs or even threats towards the protesters and their families, and how it gave lots of public opinion and media's attention for the cause. Alongside more and more politicians and influencers found the topic important and helped the women fighting for their rights.

Monika Rosa, MP from Nowoczesna, started her speech with underlining that women played a minor role in the 1989-90 transition and in the governments of the 1990s, therefore the women's rights were forgotten. She believes that there's a new generation of female local activists who can bring new quality to the regional and national politics. She explained how the law became an educational tool to change and promote diversity against the national conservative's stereotypes.

Wieke Paulusma, D66 city councilor in Groningen, continued on the topic of education the society, especially the women on their rights. She explained why quotas and equal payment laws are needed and how Holland stopped progressing in equality rankings. Answering a question from the audience she explained that educational campaigns must be directed to both women and men. She said that the closest to her heart is work with children since they are free from prejudices and can be thought easily what equality in real life means.

Timmy Dooley, MP from Irish Fianna Fail, focused on the hot topic of the anti-abortion referendum. He said it is important to work on the electoral system to guarantee representation of women in the parliament where the decisions are taken. "We need to listen to the people, not to other politicians, especially those from the other side of the political spectrum. The people are more progressive and liberal than the political class and they should set up the tone of the debate" - he concluded.

The introduction opened the floor to the debate with the audience. It was a very heated debate and questions were asked by both experts/politicians (from different parties) and local women interested in equal rights. Most of the questions were on particular labour law and social insurance solutions that work in Europe or could be implemented in the near future.

The debate lasted 30 min longer than expected due to the amount of questions.

Journalist of national and local media were presented, including TVN24.

Some 50 participants attended.

The discussion was followed by light dinner.