

## The mobilisation of women in Central and Eastern European countries: how contextual elements shaped women's NGOs from Romania and Poland

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**Abstract:** *In this article I approach the mobilization of women outside the realm of politics and inside NGOs in Romania and Poland, by analyzing some of the most important contextual elements that shaped their activities, interests or causes. In this manner, I present both similarities and differences between the communist legacies in the two countries, the effects of democratization and economic change, the civil society development and Western funding, elements of national culture, as well as transnational and EU actors. Issues such as interactions with the political sphere, network building and alliances, as well as differences between Western and Eastern countries are described throughout this endeavor. Conclusions are then drawn to stress out how different contextual elements have impacted women's movements in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries.*

**Key words:** women's mobilization • Central and Eastern Europe • NGOs in comparative perspective • Romania • Poland

### Introduction

The cultural and religious frameworks, varieties of economic transition, political contexts and organizational cultures represent some of the elements that shaped women's NGOs as we know them today. In this article, I systematize some of these contextual elements by addressing both similarities and differences that Central and Eastern (CEE) countries and women's movements from this region share, specifically in Romania and Poland. My intention is to highlight some of the essential pressures that these NGOs had to encounter in changing mentalities, attitudes and legislations in regard to gender issues and social justice. In the years that passed since the fall of communism, both countries have benefited from many improvements in regard to the status of

women. Second wave feminism in these countries was born in a very atypical relation to feminism from the Western countries, and rather had a similar fate with the first wave feminism, in regard to civil and political rights (Popescu, 2004; Miroiu 2015) but also being a 'fast-line' feminism, in which generations, ideologies and institutions that have been developed for long periods of time in the West had to be fast-forwarded in post-socialism (Grabowska 2009, 10).

Therefore, the article is structured in the following manner so the shed light on the development of women's mobilization in a comparative perspective. Firstly, I address how the communist regime affected women's movements in the two countries from the perspective of women and the Solidarity movement in Poland and a 'private' solidarity in Romania. Then, I present how the patterns of formation and the effects of democratization and economic changes have affected the newly women's NGOs. Thirdly, I emphasize the ways in which these organizations learned to play 'the funding game', due to the presence of external funding actors, that proved to be the allies of these NGOs in a conservative and traditionalist social and political environment. In this approach I then present the role of transnational and EU actors. Throughout the article I also address some issues that are connected to the particularities of the CEE countries, how networks and alliances have played an important role at the national and international level and how, in some manners, some hierarchies of power are present between Western and Eastern actors. Conclusions are then drawn on the basis of the comparative analysis, by briefly presenting the similarities and differences encountered in the two countries.

### **Communism in Romania and Poland: two faces of solidarity**

In both Romania and Poland, the communist regime represented the standpoint for the path-dependency process that shaped the future gender policies and women based organizations. State socialism did not "emancipate women, it did not improve their personal autonomy or their social status" (Vincze 2006, 26), but rather instrumentalized them as „tools of the party" making them „heroic workers" in the public sphere, or „mothers of the nation" through pro-natalist policies, subordinating them as objects of the ethnic nation, be it Romanian or Polish (Vincze 2006, 26). Although the formal

welfare policies existed<sup>1</sup>, state socialism did not question the labor division in the private space (Bucur 2008, 1379), a practice that was further transported into the future legislation and approach to gender equality. Because gender-based constraints were perceived as neither legitimate nor as a primary concern in their lives, no serious political or intellectual movement could be mobilized around “women’s oppression” during communism (Siklova 1993; Grünberg 2000, 313). Therefore, in both countries during communism and the transition period, gender issues were marginalized and absent, both in the public sphere and in the family sphere. In Romania, the few isolated women activists could not make up for a whole movement<sup>2</sup>, especially under such an authoritarian regime. Therefore, even before they were actually established, women based NGOs were already marginalized<sup>3</sup> and isolated from the public sphere.

Nonetheless, there were some women’s organizations established during the communist regime, but they were party controlled (Women’s League<sup>4</sup>) and set out without the actual involvement of women themselves (Fuszara 2005, 1063). The ‘pseudo-feminist’ organizations that existed in both Romania and Poland were established so to prevent women from organizing collectively outside the state and further translated into a “preconditions for women’s hesitation over feminist mobilization in the present” (Grabowska 2009, 48). Moreover, the “double burden” experienced by women in the private sphere of their homes and families, highly neglected by the official policies, also caused many women to decline the Party membership or get involved in other formal organizations, from which they could get some economic or social benefits (Penn and Massiono 2009, 5) that would help them develop during transition.

Yet, the differences between the two countries also affected the role of women’s NGOs. Women’s role inside Solidarity was surely a decisive one since they were very much active in the underground structures (Penn, 1994). The 1980’s are considered the years in which women’s movement in Poland started to emerge and materialize. In 1983 the first feminist sociology seminar at the Institute of Sociology at Warsaw University was opened and in 1984 several women who attended the seminars started to meet in

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<sup>1</sup> Full-time paid employment, paid maternity leave, annual paid leave to care for sick children and subsidized child care are some of these policies (Bretherton 2002, 6; Fuchs and Payer 2007, 164).

<sup>2</sup> As noted by some authors (Klingman 1998; Miroiu 2004) Romania rather experienced a “private “solidarity

<sup>3</sup> By marginalization, I understand the exclusion of women’s NGOs when it comes to every-day cooperation, consultations, and access to funding (Korolczuk 2014, 959).

<sup>4</sup> See Baldez 2003.

Warsaw and Krakow and they organized the Women's Cinema Festival and the first March Feminist Session in Krakow, in 1987 (Grabowska 2013, 3). Also, due to the martial law introduced in Poland in the 1980's and the many arrests that occurred after its implementation, women took over the leadership positions in the Solidarity movement, which perhaps shaped the first glimpses of the future feminist movement in Poland. Unlike Poland, Romania did not have a dissident movement<sup>1</sup>, due to the repressive secret police. The few dissidents were either isolated and had no ties one with another, or were part of larger labor movements with clear agendas, such as the miners' strike in 1977 (FDSC 2005, 17). The country rather experience a "private" solidarity network (Klingman 1998), in which the forms of resistance were made in small, yet powerful manners, such as support in regard to abortion issues, redistributing food, clothes, books and other improvised mechanisms of survival (Miroiu 2004, 200). The private solidarity was also an effect of the reproducing policies in Romania, through the 770 Decree from 1966, in which abortion was banned. After the fall of communism Romania immediately abolished the Decree, while in Poland the opposite direction was taking place: abortion was legal during communism, but in 1993 the reproductive rights have been restricted<sup>2</sup>. Reproductive rights have raised a lot of protests and grass-roots groups that materialized in gathering over one million signatures for a motion for a referendum to be held in this matter; a motion that was though rejected by the authorities (Fuszara 2010, 90). The abortion law passed, due to the important impact of the Catholic Church inside Solidarity movement, the medical industry, state officials and women religious groups (Grabowska and Regulska 2011, 134).

Therefore, the two aspects regarding the proto-civil society and the reproduction policies further shaped the newly emerged women NGOs in the two countries. In Poland, the underground actions transformed after the fall of communism, into cooperation between women and their struggle to push for the law regarding abortion not to pass. In Romania, due to the historic events, the private solidarity transposed into the creation of several women NGOs as well, but in scattered manner (Miroiu 2015). The newly created women based NGOs were therefore scattered yet based on a group solidarity that

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<sup>1</sup> Regarding the workers' strike from Brasov in 1987, that had a profound anti-communist stance, see Kuran (1991), Keil (2002) and Cesereanu (2009).

<sup>2</sup> Abortion was legal only „if the pregnancy constitutes a threat to the life and health of the mother; if the pre-natal examination or other medical reasons point to a high probability of severe and irreversible damage to the foetus or on an incurable life-threatening disease of the child; if there is a confirmed suspicion that the pregnancy is a result of a criminal act" (Article 4a in Szelewa 2011, 7).

occurred communism. Their development as formal organizations was based on the encountering with Western feminist literature, through academia.

### **Surviving the economic and democratic transition**

How can these aspects of the communist legacy impact women organization as we know them? The neglecting of the pre-communist feminist traditions translated into the total distancing from the past and adoption of a new culture, washed out of ideology or any past traditions that could be interpreted, as the communist propaganda has made many times. Nevertheless, as remarked by one of the Polish feminists (Graff 2008<sup>1</sup>) in both countries, during transition, it was “too late and too early for feminism<sup>2</sup>”, and the weak feminist agenda that had been developed in some NGOs was rather civic-cultural, connecting women NGOs with the academia rather than with the political environment (Miroiu 2004, 243; see also Borza 2008; 2010). The liberal ideology of feminism in both Romania and Poland was a “response to the growing conservatism of state institutions” (Grabowska and Regulska 2011, 145), although in Poland right wing discourses had become more prominent than in Romania.

The transition<sup>3</sup> period, although different in many aspects in the two countries, has impacted women based NGOs in some similar manners. For example, as concerning the political and economic measures, women were rather objects than subjects of change (Brunnbauer 2002, 154). Moreover, as noted before by many transition scholars, the economic, social and political transition created disparities between women and men, which were highly endorsed by the end of the affirmation politics and the quota system (Saxonberg and Sloat 2004), the higher rates of unemployment and low-paid and low-status positions in the labor market (Klingman 1994, Pascall and Kwak 2005). With some few exceptions of urban based upper-middle class women, in terms of social and economic status and political representation and due to the neoliberal economy and the neo-traditional ideologies that arose in the CEE countries “that went hand in hand with the market images of sexy” (Johnson and Robinson 2004 *in* Miroiu 2004, 219), women experienced the “domestication” of their issues (Brunnbauer 2002, 154). In Poland, the

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bu.edu/today/2008/why-poland-is-afraid-of-feminism/>, accessed 02.12.2015;

<sup>2</sup> I refer to feminism as encompassing all types of ideas, theories and policies that promote and lead to the exercise of women’s rights and autonomy, affirmation and increasing the public power of women; as an emancipatory strategy (Miroiu 2004, 251).

<sup>3</sup> Transition is regarded as economic and political, with the liberalization of markets and civil societies, but social in relation to welfare structures, households and of gender relations and assumptions within both (Pascall, Kwak 2005, 1).

trend of gender re-traditionalization occurred due to the influence of the Catholic Church and the Solidarity Party, “seeing the traditional family as a way to assert Polish national identity after Russian and soviet domination” (Fuszara 2000; 2005; 2008; 2010; LaFont 2001; Pascall and Kwak 2005, 7). As Tarta notes (2015, 33) European social funds and God were the means of compensating the post-communist economic dismay in the two countries. In Romania, the moral and cultural landmark of the Orthodox Church<sup>1</sup>, which is a “patriarchal model in itself” (Miroiu 2004, 215) and the left-conservatist ideology (Miroiu 1999), created the framework of a “show room democracy<sup>2</sup>”. The untouched private domain as a legacy of the communist regime did not change during the transition period (Braunbauer 2002, 152) rather it perpetuated the traditional values and attitudes towards women (Regulska 1998, 52) in both countries.

Moreover, women were low represented in the elected bodies and in both Romania and Poland the idea of introducing quotas resembled the communist past rather too much. Yet Poland didn't adopt a formal quota system under communism, women were formally elected inside the public bodies. However, some parliamentarians and members of women's non-governmental organizations began to work on a law to grant men and women equal status in society in Poland (Siemienska 2004, 2). In this sense, being pressured from female party members, “three political parties agreed to introduce a 30 percent quota: the two coalition partners – the Alliance of Democratic Left (SLD) and the Labour Union (UP), and also the centrist Union of Freedom. Fifty organizations joined the Pre-Electoral Coalition of Women—an open agreement between women's organizations and groups entered into a few months before the 2001 elections.(...) Women parliamentarians from all parties organized an action entitled ‘Women run, women vote’ to convince voters to support women candidates” (Siemienska 2004, 3-4). In 2007, Women's Party was founded to run for the 2007 elections and its principle issues conveyed child birth, child care, and equal pay (Fuszara 2011, Freidenval et. al 2012, 19<sup>3</sup>). The electoral quota system was finally embraced by the Polish Parliament

<sup>1</sup> As in the early 1990's until nowadays, in Romania „in poll after poll, the army and the church – institutions that represent authority and stability –have the highest credibility” (Grünberg 2000, 310).

<sup>2</sup> A ‘show-room democracy’ is considered to have the traits of a real democracy, yet only in a superficial manner, like “the objects from a showcase are most often genuine, but not used – just exposed (...) civil society has little government influence (...) women, minorities and the poor are absent or excluded from the public life (Pasti, Miroiu, Codita 1996, 127).

<sup>3</sup>[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/493011/IPOLFEMM\\_NT\(2013\)493011\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/note/join/2013/493011/IPOLFEMM_NT(2013)493011_EN.pdf), accessed 30.03.2015

and in 2011 Poland adopted the electoral gender quota system for parliamentary and local elections and for the elections in the European Parliament, “with the candidate lists inclusion of 25% of the representatives of one gender” (Szelawa 2011, 7). This was proposed at the initiative of the umbrella NGO, “Congress of Women” (*Kongres Kobiet*). Therefore, Poland experienced the implication of women on behalf of civil society and political parties for the improving of their representation.

In Romania, the quota system existed during the communist regime, but with two aspects that generally hindered women from real political power: the Communist party and its men were “wielding the real power” and “many women were promoted before they were experienced enough to do well in their posts” (Fisher and Harsanyi 1994, 204; 207). Women had access to power, in a time where power was meaningless (Miroiu 2004). On top of that, the Elena Ceausescu personality cult and her role in the political sphere had been used as an argument against the involvement of women in politics, to which several political figures had been further added to develop sexist arguments for the elimination of women and their access to power (Miroiu 2004, 201-2). This deeply affected the role of women in politics and the culpability role that has been further attributed on this basis. Some parties, such as the Social Democratic Party of Romania announced that it would introduce a 25% quota for women on its electoral lists in 2001 and the Democratic Party announced a 30% quota, but the measures have not been adopted; in 2004 a similar measure has been announced, and finally enforced<sup>1</sup>. However, an electoral quota system at the national level has not been embraced. This issue translates in different way in which women are closer to political power, the way in which NGOs could cooperate with legislators and their political effect of their work. Moreover, political representation and civil awareness in regard to women since to be missing from the women based NGOs agenda in Romania, whereas in Poland, women NGOs struggle to influence the way women are represented and measures have been taken in this direction.

### **Women’s mobilization in civil society organizations**

In Poland women founded NGOs around the ban on abortion, the transformation of the living conditions, education, work and other gendered-oriented issues (Fuchs and

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<sup>1</sup> More details here - for Romania, <http://www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.cfm?CountryCode=RO#party> and for Poland <http://www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.cfm?country=179> accessed 30. 03. 2015

Payer 2007, 169; Grabowska and Regulska 2011, 139). It is considered that the first bottom-up or grassroots women groups emerged in the early years of the *Solidarity* in 1980-81, with the clear aim of gaining independence (Fuszara 2005, 1064), yet after 1989, the abortion act that passed the *Sejm* led to the creation of women's organization 'from below', with almost 300 newly based organizations and initiatives (Kurczewski et al. 2003 *apud* Fuszara 2005, 1065). „Though it ended up being a lost cause, the abortion debate paradoxically authorized the existence of feminism in the Polish public sphere”, according to Grabowska and Regulska (2011, 139). The Romanian feminism and development of women's NGOs was created when the majority of women have “met” with the feminist theories, have internalized them and became feminists especially in the educational and academic field; a feminism that will diversify itself in the future years (Moloea 2015), developed locally, out of a need of having an agenda<sup>1</sup>. The Romanian feminism could be described as “a mind without a body” (Miroiu 2015, 202) having a low power in influencing policymakers (Grünberg 2000), but a strong force in transforming the political culture. Moreover, a distinctive feature of the Romanian women's movement is its lack of a clearly defined objective or set of priorities (Grünberg 2000, 319). The feminist agenda was rather civic-cultural; the connections between the academia and the women NGOs were rather closer than the ones between the political environments (Miroiu 2004, 243).

The national legal and institutional framework also encountered changes<sup>2</sup> in Romania and in Poland<sup>3</sup>, since many of the old formal laws have been changed, while others have been introduced, such as the percentage law in 2003 in Romania<sup>4</sup> and Poland<sup>5</sup> (Glinski

<sup>1</sup> In countries like Romania or Bulgaria, it is hard to differentiate between what was the imposed feminism and the local one, partly because in the first years they were closely connected (Ghodsee 2004), considering that “in our histories and in our literature in general, there are few or no examples of significant protest activities, or even assertive behavior, on the part of Romanian women” (Miroiu and Popescu 2004, 300).

<sup>2</sup> Law no. 339 of 17 July 2006, for the amendment and completion of the Law of Volunteerism no. 195/2001, available at [http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis\\_pck.act\\_text?id=74382](http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.act_text?id=74382), laws that regulate fiscal aspects, such as the Law 571/2003 regarding the Fiscal Code and various laws on social contributions, as well as the overall legislation: Ordinance 26/2000 regarding associations and foundations, Ordinance 37/2003 amending and supplementing Ordinance 26/2000, Law no. 123/2005 regarding the rejection of the Ordinance 37/2000 and the Law 246/18th July 2005 for the approval of the Ordinance 26/2000 regarding associations and foundations. In this regard, an organization or foundation that is non-governmental and non-profit has actions that aim to perform activities of general interest or in the interest of communities, or as appropriate, for their founder's non-patrimonial interest. Available at <http://www.lumeaong.org/legislatie-ong.html>; accessed 08.08.2014;

<sup>3</sup> The Act on Public Benefit and Volunteer Work in Poland in 2003, with amendments made in January 2010, Law on Associations (1989), Law on Foundations (1984), available at <http://www.legislationline.org/topics/subtopic/17/topic/1/country/10>; accessed 08.08.2014;

<sup>4</sup> [http://static.anaf.ro/static/10/Anaf/Legislatie\\_R/Cod\\_fiscal\\_norme\\_2015.htm](http://static.anaf.ro/static/10/Anaf/Legislatie_R/Cod_fiscal_norme_2015.htm); accessed 08.08.2014;

<sup>5</sup> More information here: <http://jedenprocent.pl/index.html>. In Poland, the church is not a beneficiary of this law, except for the NGOs established by the church (Bullain 2004), unlike in Romania where the church is one of the main beneficiaries (FDSC 2010, 86).

2004; Wygnanski 2004). Yet, it is also important to note that the national legislation in both countries was contributing to the re-distribution of power and resources among NGOs through the fact that both countries inherited culture and leisure organizations from the communist period (as culture and recreation were among two fields of social activity tolerated and even encouraged by the Communist state) that held a privileged position and capital (Johnson and Young, 1997; Carothers 1999; Dakova et al. 2000, 13; Bunea 2007; Klon/Jawor 2004) and continued to receive favors, such as public money (Ekiert and Kubic 2014, 50); as well as the 1 % law in Poland and 2% law in Romania that seemed to have worked for some types of organizations, but not for others. In this manner, Western assistance had similar effects in both countries, supporting some NGOs over the others, in fields such as advocacy or human rights (Quigley 2000, 198). Some women based NGOs relabeled their activities so to qualify for funding programs regarding development and human rights, since this was the strategy that many funders adopted. The low resources and marginalization meant that women based NGOs could be prone to adapt to the ones who were offering them resources, financial and moral. Adaptation therefore took some similar forms in both Romania and Poland.

Thus, The Western assistance, as well as their urbanization<sup>1</sup> brought a negative perception of NGOs, folding with low participation inside the civil society, and entangling with the idea of “forced “volunteerism” during the communist period and the rejection of previously forced group identities (Regulska and Grabowska 2012, 142). The mass-media (Gender Barometer, 2000; Roventă-Frumușani 2002, 47-67) by perpetuating stereotypes, also “contributed to the public opinion's reception of gender-related issues and feminine/masculine images in a confuse, hostile, and superficial horizon, delimited by the scarcity of information, the ignorance or minimization of gender relations, or their unconditional criticism and rejection” (Hurubean 2013, 7).

### **The role of EU and transnational actors on women’s NGOs**

The Beijing Conference (1995), the EU accession (2004 in Poland, 2007 in Romania) and the gender institutionalization that occurred before and after the accession also influenced women based NGOs, as well as the equality agenda, which has been “strongly embedded in both the post-communist legacy as well as the process of EU accession”,

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<sup>1</sup> Krakow, Poznan, Wroclaw, Legnica, Torun are some of the cities except Warsaw in which women NGOs are visible in Poland (McMahon 2002, 46), while Cluj, Timisoara, Iasi and Sibiu are some of the cities except Bucharest in which women and gender NGOs are visible in Romania.

but with variation to the patterns of institutionalizing and different engagements of intersectionality (Kriszan and Zentai 2012, 178). The Beijing Conference represented a place of networking and imitation as well as the emergence of many women NGOs in CEE countries (Fuchs and Payer 2007, 165). Women NGOs representatives met and discussed their future strategies and adopted a more transnational approach to gender policies, with the support of UN actors. At The Beijing Conference, I believe the relationships between West and East have been outlined, as to what was happening at the moment and what will occur in the future, in the funding scheme: the notion of ‘non-region<sup>1</sup>’ that Eastern European women were experience became symbolic in the “Western-center” and “Western-morphic” context. Post-Beijing, the agenda of women’s organizations has shifted, a new process of NGO-ization and professionalization appeared as well as a new language of “gender equality” and new strategies such as the “gender mainstreaming” into state institutions (Verloo 2007, 152). Nevertheless, it also attracted critics<sup>2</sup>, especially to the term ‘gender’ and its terminology that continues to shape many policies, projects and grants and which covers much of our vocabulary when referring to women or sexual minorities’ aspects.

Nevertheless, the reluctance towards women issues became less problematic due to the EU accession process that imposed several general gender equality policies through legal frameworks (treaties, directives, and recommendations) and therefore women’s organizations became important actors in this process: “Women’s NGOs achieved the status of actors, often transnational. The action of the women’s transnational networks has had a great thrust in economic, political and transnational relations matters” (Ferreira, 2000, 27). Yet, the EU *acquis* has been regarded as a “human-face patriarchy” due to its feminist content<sup>3</sup> in regard to anti-discrimination laws, equal opportunities, domestic violence and sensitivity towards sexual minorities (Miroiu 2004, 259), but

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<sup>1</sup> At the Conference, CEE countries were not considered a region and had no space for discussions, as the other regions in Europe (Grabowska 2009, 81). This further transported in the focus of both Romanian and Polish officials on emphasizing the “Europeness” of these countries’ politics than its eastern European specificities. (Grabowska 2009, 82)

<sup>2</sup> Ghodsee (2006, 47) addresses the issue of ‘gender experts’, who represent “a new a new class, that is outside the state and the market, but can easily adapt to any of its institutions”; either coming from Western countries into the CEE ones, or local based ones that give recommendation to governments, or write grants and participate in international conferences.

<sup>3</sup> To name a few measures made at the European level in regard to gender equality: the adoption of the European Consensus on Development (2005) that recognizes gender equality as a goal in its own right and as one of the five common principles of EU development cooperation; as well as the Communication on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Development Cooperation (2007), the subsequent Council Conclusions which translate into the gender inequalities within the new member states into the public arena (Staszewska, Esplen, Dion 2010, 10).

mostly these changes were taken in a top-down fashion, a Western-Eastern manner, paternalistic and less sensitive to local issues which needed also grass-roots feminism. The EU accession, as feminist scholars<sup>1</sup> have observed, brought contradictory results for women: they opened up new possibilities for mobilization and coalition building, facilitated access to specific resources (networking) and legitimized some claims, simultaneously limiting other possibilities and posing new constraints on women's NGOs as well. This happened partly because of the initial weak position of women's organizations, but also from the interplay between the local/ national and transnational level. At the discourse level, the gender 'rhetoric' was highly adopted within the EU standards of implementation and adoption, creating a "room-service feminism", which represents the Romanian transition feminism, imposed by the EU than by the actions undertaken by women based NGOs (Miroiu 2004, 257).

The EU accession has also impacted women and gender NGOs in regard professionalization, a manner in which activists could also take part in international debates, conferences and networks and try to ameliorate some legal framework promoted at the EU level. The professionalization of NGOs<sup>2</sup> in both countries had encountered yet struggling for human resources, "a professional base has developed, mostly with the assistance of foreign donors and good practices have been developed (FDSC 2005, 73). This process started once with the presence of Western funders and further developed after the EU accession. Transnational organizations represented the main types of institutions that were financing the NGOs in the CEE countries, such as the IMF, World Bank EBRD, PHARE Program; governmental agencies through US AID<sup>3</sup> and private organizations such as Soros Foundation, Humboldt Foundation, Ford Foundation (Bunea 2007, 16) before the EU accession. These organizations managed to establish local organizations for the management of funds, to bring infrastructural support, develop trainings, seminars and workshops.

Yet, critics arose, saying that foreign assistance has fostered "small, formalized, bureaucratized, professionalized cadre-staff organizations that have learnt to play the

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<sup>1</sup> More on how women perceive the changes inside the social, economic and political sphere in Romania see Baluta, Dragolea, Iancu (2007) or Neaga (2013).

<sup>2</sup> The reorientation due to the transition from traditional social movement to small-scale professionalized organizations of women can be seen in the structure, ideology, program and strategy of women based NGOs: "the transition from movement to NGO brought with it a structural emphasis on professionalized but decentralized small-scale organizations and a turn from anti-hierarchical to more-hierarchical structures" (Lang 1997, 102).

<sup>3</sup> From 1990 to 1996, 2,7\$ billion dollars were channeled by 15 CEE countries, initially as technical assistance and then through the provision of grants (Quigley 2000, 195).

“funding game” (Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013, 6, in Vlad 2013, 63). The process of NGO-ization and professionalization also meant a growing dependence on EU funds and financial support from private donors that clearly affected Polish civil society: “NGOs gradually turn into bureaucratic and apolitical institutions, while the people engaged in the third sector are predominantly interested in the wellbeing and survival of their organizations rather than social change (Korolczuk 2014, 954-55). Nevertheless, it has also been argued that due to bureaucratization, people prefer to get involved in more informal actions, at the local level than work with documents inside the organizations’ offices (Korolczuk 2014, 955). This phenomenon started to occur in Romania and Poland by the new generation of feminists, that had embraced a more informal but confrontational stance than the early feminists of the transition period (Grabowska 2009, Vlad 2013, 2015).

In Romania “until 2010, mainstream feminist and women’s rights organizations were almost exclusively engaged in routine means of influencing politics (advocacy, open letters, petitions), while feminists involved in the left, more underground scene assumed a more confrontational stance, organizing and participating in protests” (Vlad 2013, 77). This occurred in both countries, making a clear delimitation between formal (liberal) women NGOs that have to access funds and informal (leftist) women organizations that stand inside the underground movement<sup>1</sup>. Yet, This process of Europeanization had also created a new wave of feminist activism in Poland and Romania that managed to diversify the variety of the women members and incorporate an intersectional approach to its stance (Jewish and Catholic feminists in Poland, Roma feminists in Romania (see Oprea 2004; 2012), sexual minorities in both countries).

As far as the funding story goes, Poland, in the early years, obtained funds for civil society from private funders, especially German (Humboldt Foundation, Bosch Stiftung), but also French (Foundation de Pologne) and of course Soros Foundation (Quigley 1997, 48; 244). On the other hand Romania was benefitting from public programs from the US or the EU, such as the National Endowment for Democracy, PHARE and of course US AID (Carothers 1996, 56). The EU funds were channeled through PHARE Civil Society Development Program, PHARE for Democracy, PHARE LIEN and the PHARE for Partnership (NGO-Stock Taking in Romania, 47). After the EU accession and the withdrawal of many private and American donors, two important

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<sup>1</sup> On this topic see Vlad (2013) and Fuszara (2005, 2010).

funders have been developing programs and actions in both countries, such as the EEA Grants and Norway Grants<sup>1</sup> (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) and the Swiss Cooperation Programme<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, women based NGOs experienced similar funders, yet in different amount, channels and procedures.

## Conclusions

Generally, in both countries, women, with less political and symbolic resources, organized themselves outside the political parties, in various NGOs, so to persuade politicians to vote for laws against discrimination, domestic violence and gender equality (see Miroiu 2004), and also to influence the equal opportunities policies and the democratization process. The communist legacy and the cultural aspects of these countries, even though different in many aspects, had lead organizations to adopt a certain kind of ideology (liberal), which was further stressed by the Western donors' "modus operandi". Moreover, the pressures of the neoliberal economic transition, as well as the communist legacy and limitation of the public domain in the public sphere have left women with poor political and symbolic resources. Within the transition or transformation period, women's NGOs took different paths in Romania and in Poland, having developed from an academic standpoint in Romania and from grassroots movements in Poland, due to the abortion rights. Nevertheless, in both countries they developed in similar manners, as a response to the economic and political factors and the more traditional views regarding gender. In both countries there has been a „baby-boom“ (Chimiak 2006) of NGOs, due to the newly adopted legislative frameworks that helped these organizations to develop and the presence of Western donors. International actors and donors have highly impacted these organizations by establishing new modes of working, through trainings, seminars and workshops and human resources. Despite the fact that women's organizations were active in the international and national level, few of them managed to concentrate on the rural and regional level. In this regard, in both countries most of the women and gender NGOs became an urban phenomenon, being closer to the centers of power and finance. The

<sup>1</sup> Romanian benefitted from €98.5 million during 2004-2009 and €306 million during 2009-2014, whilst Poland benefitted €558.6 million (2004-2009) and €578.1 million during 2009-2014. More information available here <http://eeagrants.org/statusreport>; accessed 22.02.2015;

<sup>2</sup> More information on the programme here: [http://www.swisscontribution.ro/swiss/afisarePagina.html?method=afisarePagina&tip=50&categoriebunuri=prezentaregen%20en&pagina=Institutii&locale=en&menu=Institutii\\_en](http://www.swisscontribution.ro/swiss/afisarePagina.html?method=afisarePagina&tip=50&categoriebunuri=prezentaregen%20en&pagina=Institutii&locale=en&menu=Institutii_en); accessed 22.02.2015;

period in which they become important actors in both countries, after almost a decade of being highly biased due to the conservative political parties and the general public, was in the time of the EU accession. Yet, after the accession, numerous important donors have shifted from these countries, profoundly impacting the organizations that were highly dependent on external funding. The gender institutionalization had different ways of development in each country, yet this period is regarded as the professionalization or NGO-ization phase, in which the organizations that had access to European funds became more institutionalized. Despite the different context in which they emerged, the similarities between organizations have been highlighted, due to external pressures from governments and international actors, but also as forms of development from within.

In regard to the differences between the women and gender based NGOs in Romania and Poland, besides the interpretation of legal frameworks and coercive pressures, the size, age and members can shape organizations to take various organizational forms, the most important factors that affected women and gender NGOs are connected to institutional path dependencies, civil society mobilization, discursive opportunity structures and political opportunity structures and different trajectories of change. Therefore, even though in the Solidarity movement the gender issues were not encountered, the movement itself had an important role in the development of the civil society in Poland. Moreover, Poland experienced a grassroots feminist movement around the abortion law that was adopted in 1993, in which many women's NGOs have been established. On the other hand, women and gender NGOs in Romania have developed around the academia, in a genuine manner, but rather one of a "collective privacy", in places where women usually met and without significant public and political consequences, due to its private character (Miroiu 2015, 200).

Moreover, the transition period had different paths in the two countries, further affecting women NGOs: the organizations in Poland had different economic opportunities than the ones in Romania, and many organizations developed their activities around the labor market and entrepreneurial sector. The quota system introduced in Poland has helped NGOs to collaborate with the local authorities, having made these organizations to access national and regional grants. Romania could not adopt the quota system, due to its fragmentation inside the women's NGOs and the lack of political support and therefore many organizations were highly dependent on foreign

funds. The EU accession, having two different time spans and the shift of funding also impacted these organizations differently, yet NGOs became important actors especially in the gender intersectionality of public policies, collaborating with the state and the international actors. In Poland membership fees were preeminent, while in Romania NGOs continued to rely on external funded projects. The mechanism of funding accession also differed, making this process easier for the organizations in Poland than those in Romania.

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