

'Implementing gender mainstreaming in the EU: a battle of policy frames?'

Emanuela Lombardo, Complutense University, Madrid

lombardo@unizar.es

Petra Meier, Radboud University, Nijmegen

pmeier@fm.ru.nl

Introduction

In this paper we argue that the existence of competing gender policy frames in the EU affect the implementation of gender mainstreaming. The assumption is that the impact that gender mainstreaming can have on the generation of a more gender equal society depends on the way in which it is interpreted, and in particular on the extent to which a feminist interpretation of it infiltrates political debates. Gender mainstreaming is an open signifier that can be filled with both feminist and non feminist content, thus we provide a feminist definition of it that is based on five shifts that we deem would have a major positive impact on gender equality policies. However, we are aware of the fact that gender mainstreaming as a strategy is not based on the premises underlying these shifts and, moreover, that it can be based on a variety of explicit or implicit premises. To explore the extent to which a feminist reading of gender mainstreaming is taking place in the EU political discourse, we analyse how family policy and gender inequality in politics are framed in the EU, considering that a gender mainstreaming process is most easily launched in the framework of explicitly gendered issues. If gender policies themselves should present inconsistencies in their framing, such inconsistencies will increase in other less explicitly gendered policy areas in which gender is mainstreamed. The frame analysis of EU documents on family policy and gender inequality in politics reveals the existence of frame inconsistencies and competing premises. This enables us to draw implications for the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the EU in general and of its feminist content in particular. The paper is divided in six sections: the first section introduces the concept of gender mainstreaming in the EU context addressing the implementation deficit, the second provides a feminist definition of gender mainstreaming, the third discusses the theoretical and methodological aspects of frame analysis that are relevant to the argument, the fourth and fifth include the analysis of EU policy frames on gender inequality in politics and family policies, and the sixth section, followed by conclusions, is a discussion of the findings concerning frame inconsistencies and competing premises.

1 Gender mainstreaming in the EU

Gender mainstreaming has been part of the *acquis communautaire* from the nineties, through two Treaty Articles, three Action Programmes and a growing number of soft law provisions that increasingly appear to be the privileged means to implement the strategy. The Treaty of Amsterdam of 1997 recognised a prominent role to gender

mainstreaming by introducing a new article 2 ToA establishing the promotion of equality between men and women as a task of the Community, and a new Article 3.2 ToA stating that in all its activities ‘the Community shall aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality, between men and women’. Gender mainstreaming was also reflected in the Third, Fourth and Fifth Commission’s Action Programmes for Equal Opportunities between women and men (1991-1995, 1996-2000 and 2001-2005).

All existing Articles on gender mainstreaming and gender equality have been maintained in the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (IGC 87/04 rev 1). In particular the Constitution includes Article I-2 on the promotion of equality between women and men as one of the objectives of the Union, Article III-116 (former Art. 3.2 TEU), that is a general clause prescribing that the EU shall aim at eliminating inequalities between women and men and promote equality, and Article II-83 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights prescribing that ‘equality between women and men must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay’.

However, rather than being codified through legally binding measures, gender mainstreaming emerges as a soft law instrument of EU gender policies, capable of including a wide range of different conceptions and interests within its extremely blurred borders (Jacquot 2003). Soft legislation on gender mainstreaming includes, among other documents, a Commission Communication 96/67 on ‘Incorporating equal opportunities for women and men into all Community policies and activities’, stating that a gender mainstreaming approach ‘involves not restricting efforts to promote equality to the implementation of specific measures to help women, but mobilising all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality by actively and openly taking into account at the planning stage their possible effects on the respective situation of men and women (gender perspective)’ (COM(96)67final). In spite of these general claims, the Communication does not envisage any objective or strategy for implementing gender mainstreaming, nor does it refer to women’s participation in political decision-making as a goal¹.

In spite of the formal incorporation of gender mainstreaming in the *acquis communautaire*, scholars agree in finding modest signs of implementation of the strategy in the EU policy-making (Behning and Serrano Pascual 2001; Verloo 2001; Walby 2004). The EU constitution-making process is a good example of the gap existing between policy formulation and implementation of gender mainstreaming. The Conventions that drafted the Charter of Fundamental Rights (2000) and the European Constitution (2003) proved to be committed to promoting gender mainstreaming in their legal frameworks, but not ready yet for putting it into practice in the context of their own constitution-making processes (Lombardo 2005). In most cases, gender policies implemented in the European countries after the official introduction of gender mainstreaming in 1995 were a mere continuation of previous policies (Behning and Serrano Pascual 2001). In some cases, though, gender mainstreaming was interpreted as an indication to replace specific gender policies and structures, in spite of the warnings of experts on mainstreaming who made clear that the latter interpretation was a misunderstanding of the concept (Council of Europe 1998). In the European Union, that is generally considered one of the most ‘women-friendly’ polities, gender mainstreaming was taken at first as a good excuse for both diluting gender expertise (gender experts could cease to be required as everyone suddenly became an expert in gender) and dismantling the infrastructures created to support gender policies. The fact that gender equality was now included in the mainstream policy led to the assumption

¹ This is rather addressed in Council Recommendation 96/694 on the balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process.

that special funds and specific programmes for women should disappear as there was no further need for them (examples are the replacement of NOW with EQUAL and proposals for the abolition of the Committee on Women's Rights (CWR) of the EP). The result is that after more than a decade from its appearance in the EU political arena, gender mainstreaming has not been effectively implemented, in spite of its formal inclusion.

2 A feminist definition of gender mainstreaming

Some theorists argue that barriers to gender mainstreaming in the EU are not due to a difficulty in assimilating the concept, but rather to the patriarchal opposition to feminist goals implied in the strategy. The more radical 'agenda-setting' approach to gender mainstreaming has, in fact, the potential of challenging gendered roles, structures and policies threatening EU patriarchal political contexts in which individual women and men act (Stratigaki forthcoming). Underlying this argument is the assumption that gender mainstreaming should challenge traditional gender roles from a feminist perspective, which brings us to the definition of gender mainstreaming. The most commonly accepted definition of gender mainstreaming is formulated by the Council of Europe that conceives it as: 'the (re)organization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making' (Council of Europe 1998: 15). This definition is an empty signifier to the extent that it focuses on the procedural changes gender mainstreaming involves but does not address what we should understand by a gender equality perspective. To capture what aspects could belong to a feminist reading of gender mainstreaming, this paper refers to a set of criteria previously identified in order to recognise whether a gender mainstreaming strategy has been adopted (Council of Europe 1998, Lombardo 2003, Meier forthcoming). The idea is that at least five shifts must occur in the policy-making process to be able to say that gender mainstreaming has been put into practice.

The first is a shift in concepts underlying the policy-making process. Gender mainstreaming implies a shift towards a broader and more holistic concept of gender equality, with a focus on gender and not only on women, and the aim of achieving substantive equality. A more holistic approach explicitly targets patriarchy by tackling the multiple interconnected causes which create an unequal relation between the sexes to the disadvantage of women in the areas of family, paid work, politics, sexuality, culture, and male violence (Walby 1990). It means that changes in men's lifestyles are necessary as the role of one sex significantly affects the opportunities and lifestyles of the other. A broader concept also implies the adoption of a whole range of different strategies, from equal opportunities to positive actions, with a view to achieve substantive equality. Both the emphasis on a more holistic approach to tackle gender inequality and the focus on gender and expected changes in men and women's roles are frequent feminist claims.

A second shift is the incorporation of a gender perspective into the mainstream political agenda. Reference to gender issues and considerations regarding the extent to which a given provision could affect women and men should be found in all policy areas. It also means that the mainstream political agenda has been reoriented by rethinking and re-articulating policy ends and means from a gender perspective, i.e. Jahan's 'agenda-setting' approach (Jahan 1995). The latter implies a transformation and

reorientation of existing policy paradigms, by changing decision-making structures and processes, and prioritising gender objectives among competing issues. The transformative character of the 'agenda-setting' approach appears more in accordance with the feminist challenges posed to existing hierarchical gender distribution of power than do more 'integrationist' approaches to mainstreaming.

It is true that a more equal sharing of political power might not necessarily (and certainly not exclusively) involve an equal representation of wo/men in elected and decision-making bodies, that would be a result rather than a requirement of gender mainstreaming (Meier forthcoming, Meier et al. forthcoming). However, if everyday policy-making practice can enlighten the definition of the strategy, Stratigaki's account of the manipulation of gender mainstreaming in the EU as serving to counteract women's demand for binding positive action measures in decision-making is a lesson to be learnt (Stratigaki forthcoming). In this sense, a third shift recommending an equal political representation of wo/men is to be seen as a way to ensure that women will, at least numerically, be part of the mainstream. The feminist component involved in this shift is that it directly challenges the unequal gender distribution of economic resources and threatens men's political hierarchy. The power shift, however, does not simply rely on an increase in female numbers and might rather lie in the challenging of the existing male norm upon which criteria for the attribution of values are based and political priorities are set. Related to this is, thus, a fourth shift that concerns the prioritising of gender equality objectives and the framing of specific policies for women with the aim of achieving substantive equality. There should be evidence that gender equality objectives and policies that are of particular concern for women have been given relevance among competing objectives (i.e. in terms of financial and human resources, type of measures with respect, for instance, to binding/non-binding legislation, etc.). Both the critique of equality interpreted as assimilation to the dominant male norm, that is implied in the third shift, and the struggle to place gender issues at the top of the political agenda of the fourth shift are recurrent feminist demands.

Finally, a fifth shift concerns the institutional and organizational cultures of political decision-making, and requires changes in the policy-process, policy mechanisms and regarding policy actors. This includes the acquisition of the necessary gender expertise, a knowledge of the mechanism causing and reproducing gender inequality and of the means to solve it. It involves a greater cooperation among actors of different policy areas and from civil society, as well as the development and use of new appropriate policy tools. Ideas about the need for a change of political structures and processes driven by an increased awareness of gender mechanisms on which inequalities are originated and reproduced are highly present in feminist agendas. Concerning the cooperation between policy-makers and civil society, the demand to create 'velvet triangles' of empowerment to link the formal with the informal aspect of political action has been raised by many contemporary feminist scholars and activists.

3 Gender mainstreaming and policy frame analysis in the EU

It goes without saying that these five shifts would have a major impact on many current gender equality policies. The point is that gender mainstreaming as a strategy is not per definition based on the premises underlying these shifts and, moreover, it can be based on various premises. Also, the premises of gender mainstreaming politics might not be explicit, which increases the likeliness of the co-occurrence of conflicting premises. In

this paper we analyse how gender equality policies are framed in the EU. Our argument relates to the focus on the difference in gender (in)equality policy frames as a major factor that affects the implementation of gender mainstreaming (Behning and Serrano Pascual 2001; Braithwaite 2000; Beveridge, Nott and Stephen 2000; Council of Europe 1999; Rubery and Fagan 2000; Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2000; Verloo 2001, 2004). It has been developed within the MAGEEQ project² and the underlying idea is that gender inequality as a policy problem is subject to a variety of interpretations that, consciously or unconsciously, affect the way in which public policies are framed.

A policy frame is an ‘organising principle that transforms fragmentary or incidental information into a structured and meaningful problem, in which a solution is implicitly or explicitly included’ (Verloo 2004: 6). A policy problem is usually structured into a diagnosis and a prognosis of the issue that is at stake. In the construction of policy problems different interpretations on what is the diagnosis and prognosis of the problem can make their way. For instance, gender inequality in politics can be represented as a problem of ‘women lagging behind men’ or of ‘men dominating power positions and excluding women’. Within these two broad dimensions, there emerge implicit or explicit representations of who are the problem-holders and -solvers; to what extent is gender related to the problem and solution; what are the causes of the problem and what are the means to solve it; and where are the problem and the solution located, whether in the gendered division of labour, intimacy or citizenship. Triandafyllidou and Fotiou argue that it is also relevant which actors have a voice in defining the problem and the solution in order to identify how particular ‘discursive strategies can modify the process itself by means of excluding some actors from the debate’ (Triandafyllidou and Fotiou 1998: 6.4). They show how with regard to the Fifth Action Programme and environmental sustainability the discourse of environmental actors is marginalised and their position at the discussion table is delegitimised. This is due to the dominance of frames referring to ‘rationalisation and scientification’ (the ‘appeal to the ‘objective’ validity of scientific knowledge on which modern society is based’) and to the issue of sustainable development discussed in terms of ‘economic interests, growth, employment and market expansion’ (Triandafyllidou and Fotiou 1998: 3.9). When analysing policy frames in gender equality policies the question of voice is important to see to which extent feminist actors are included.

The variety of interpretations of gender inequality as a policy problem affects in particular the strategy of gender mainstreaming, since the latter requires a multiplications of levels, actors and policy areas in order to incorporate a gender perspective in all political and administrative processes (Verloo 2004). If, on the one hand, the variety of interpretations is enriching, on the other hand, different conceptions of gender equality can distort the implementation of gender policies. It is difficult that by saying ‘gender equality’ all actors will automatically understand it in the same way. As a result, each actor will implement and sometimes even define gender equality measures according to her/his interpretation of the concept, without necessarily previously clarifying what is her/his way of conceiving equality, especially if s/he has assumed a unitary understanding of the concept. For these reasons, the study of gender mainstreaming in the EU can benefit from the analysis of differences existing in the framing of gender inequality as a policy problem.

In this paper we focus on two explicitly gendered policy issues, family policy and gender inequality in politics³. The purpose in doing so draws on the argument that a

² See www.mageeq.net

³ What is actually meant with ‘explicitly gendered’ is the extent to which human beings are visible in a given policy area, more precisely men and women, their respective positions in society and how they

gender mainstreaming process is most easily launched in the framework of an explicitly gendered topic. We consider that, if gender policies themselves should present inconsistencies in their framing, such inconsistencies will increase in other less explicitly gendered policy areas in which gender is mainstreamed. We will discuss EU policy frames in the issues of family policy and gender inequality in politics by analysing the major policy documents that have been produced over this last decade. The starting point for our analysis is 1995, date of the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing that strongly contributed to place gender mainstreaming on the agenda. Texts include policy documents from the European institutions, such as resolutions and recommendations from the Council, decisions, communications and reports from the Commission, EU Presidency reports, resolutions and reports from the EP. They also contain documents such as speeches, press releases, research reports or awareness raising and documenting brochures written and published on behalf of the European institutions.

By applying a policy frame analysis to the issues of family policy and gender inequality in politics, we identify the different and dominant or competing frames operating both explicitly and implicitly in the policy documents of the European Union. We pay attention to the articulation of both diagnostic and prognostic EU policy frames on family policies and gender inequality in politics, in order to understand the extent to which policy documents are (in)consistent and/or based on competing premises. We subsequently analyse how these findings relate to a conceptualisation of gender mainstreaming: is the issue of gender equality dealt with, is it left as an open signifier, does it have a particular meaning, to what extent can we detect elements of a feminist reading of gender mainstreaming and if not, what do we find? Reference will be made to policy frames that are absent in the EU but appear in the member states, to be able to compare EU and national frames on gender mainstreaming in relation to their feminist content. This is in line with Bacchi's 'what's the problem?' approach that highlights the importance of focusing not only 'upon the representations of those issues that reach the political agenda', but also upon 'what does not get problematised' (Bacchi 1999: 36). What is interesting for our purpose of identifying feminist/not feminist frames is to draw attention to 'silences in existing political agendas', in particular 'about power relations and gender relations' (Bacchi 1999: 60).

4 EU policy frames: gender inequality in politics⁴

4.1 Gender inequality in politics: the diagnosis of the problem

EU diagnostic frames in gender inequality in politics can be grouped in three broad areas: the first area includes representational issues and the lack of institutional responses to the problem; the second area refers to gender inequality in politics as a problem related to other structural inequalities that are mainly located in the labour market; the third area includes frames that are expression of the broader question of

relate to each other. Policy areas such as domestic violence, family policy or health care are said to be explicitly gendered, as in domestic violence victims and perpetrators have faces, and the same goes for parents and children or care providers and those in need of care. Explicitly gendered issues are those topics where the impact on roles and positions of subjects is visible at first sight.

⁴ This section is based on the following MAGEEQ research reports: Lombardo, Jalusic, Pantelidou, and Sauer 2005; Meier and Paantjens 2004. For a list of the selection of EU texts on gender inequality in politics that have been treated with frame analysis within the MAGEEQ project see Annex 1.

gender inequality; finally, the frame ‘democracy’ could also be identified as a dominant frame in the EU that considers women’s under-representation as a problem because it is a sign of the bad quality of democracy and a sign of the lack of legitimacy of EU political institutions.

The frames grouped in the first area are particularly relevant because the problem of gender inequality in politics in the EU is predominantly framed in quantitative terms⁵: women are numerically under-represented in elected and decision-making bodies. Sometimes the problem is also described as lack of a gender balanced participation in decision-making, where participation means physical presence. In some other cases the issue is represented as failing to achieve or achieving target figures set by national governments and the EU (percentages of women in elected and decision-making bodies). Policy-makers from the EU institutions are the main voices speaking in this frame. As argued in section 2, the emphasis on increasing the number of women in representative institutions has a feminist component of challenging male power positions. However, a mere focus on numbers could have the effect of de-gendering and de-politicising the issue, i.e. it is a problem of target figures, not power relations.

The fact that the frame with the highest occurrence in the texts is by far the quantitative one did not preclude the identification of other less dominant diagnostic frames concerning representational issues. One of them is the ‘women’s qualitative representation’ frame, that contains three basic ideas: first, women’s voices are silenced in politics, which means that politics lacks women’s qualities and a ‘feminine’ dimension (this discourse seems to assume the existence of an essentialist idea of women’s identity, though the features of the latter are not specified); second, women’s issues lack consideration; third, women’s skills and qualities are said to be beneficial for the labour market, for a better society and the policy-making process. In this discourse, women’s under-representation is considered as a waste of human resources and skills. The frame can be found mainly in policy-makers’ voices (primarily the CWR of the EP, secondarily, Commission, Council and female Ministers of EU member states), but also in civil society actors. The EWL develops an isolated reflection on the controversial character of women’s common political interests and needs. Reference to a more feminist idea about women’s lack of empowerment as hindering women’s skills to claim their needs and interests can be found at the Spanish regional level in the Basque Country, but not in the EU.

The electoral system is also seen as one of the causes of women’s under-representation. An isolated discourse coming from a gender expert considers the lack of problematisation of the impact of electoral systems on women’s participation in politics as a problem. Women’s under-representation persists in spite of the measures adopted is the point expressed by the ‘failure of institutional measures’ frame. Not only policy measures adopted prove ineffective, insufficient and not far-reaching (a comprehensive integrated strategy to tackle the under-representation of women is missing), but there is also resistance to change the existing political context. Both frames are common among members of the ‘velvet triangle’ represented by the CWR of the EP, gender experts and the EWL. They appear to express more feminist concerns due to their emphasis on women unfriendly institutions as part of the problem of gender inequality in politics.

⁵ The range of dominance of a frame is decided on the basis of the numerical occurrence of the frame in the ‘supertexts’. The latter is a detailed summary for each of the selected texts that makes the meaning of a text more explicit with the help of sensitising questions formulated within the MAGEEQ project (see Annex 2 for a list of the sensitising questions). A frame is defined ‘dominant’ when there are at least 7 occurrences, ‘less dominant’ when there are from 6 to 3 occurrences and ‘weak’, when occurrences go down to 1.

'Labour market' is a dominant frame that belongs to the second broad area of EU diagnostic frames on structural inequalities in the labour market. Women's low political representation/presence is put in relation with the labour market mainly in two ways. Women's labour discrimination (pay, conditions, part-time jobs) is one aspect of the problem. The under-utilisation/waste of human resources that results from having few women in decision-making positions is another aspect of the problem, as women's skills and qualities are needed in the labour market. This discourse implicitly stresses the idea that women's under-representation in politics is bad because it negatively affects the labour market. A less dominant and more feminist frame is the 'gender division of labour' that sets the problem of women's under-representation within a broader context of the traditional gendered division of labour, economic and social inequalities. Women's double burden, due to the unequal distribution of family responsibilities, and inequalities existing in the economic and social sphere contribute to worsen the problem of women's under-representation. In the 'labour' frame it is the voice of policy-makers that emerges, predominantly the Commission, and, less frequently the EP (CWR). In the 'gender division of labour' voices speaking are both those of EU gender experts and policy-makers.

The 'equality' frame is dominant in the EU, with a discourse on under-representation being a problem because a balanced participation is perceived as a condition for or a founding principle of equality and equality between the sexes is a founding principle of EU legislation. The 'discrimination' frame is less dominant but still rather frequent. It sets women's under-representation in politics within a broader context of discrimination of women in different spheres, though the discourse is not particularly articulated. The 'equality/discrimination' frame is shared by EU institutional actors, experts and the EWL. The frame on 'lack of social infrastructures', particularly childcare facilities, as an obstacle to women's political participation is a weak frame that adopts a more global approach to the problem. The frame is expressed through the voice of the EP CWR, and, secondarily, the Commission (Social Affairs).

In the third area that concerns the broader question of gender inequality are two weak frames, i.e. 'patriarchy' and 'male domination in politics'. The 'patriarchy' frame refers to the existence of patriarchal relations and power structures causing the problem of women's under-representation and keeping women out of power. Gender bias, patriarchal legal obstacles and attitudes affect recruitment, selection and election process of political candidates. The 'male domination' frame sees the reverse side of women's under-representation, that is male domination of political life and decision-making as a problem. Politics, industry and trade unions are said to be male dominated. It is definitely not a common frame to find in official texts, in fact it is present in the discourse of gender advocates such as gender experts, the CWR of the EP, and female Ministers. The frames can be associated with a more feminist standpoint that seeks the structural causes of gender inequality and identifies male domination as one of the causes of women's exclusion from political power. For this reason, it is interesting to compare the EU with the member states, as the 'patriarchy/male domination' diagnostic frame can be found in Austria in particular, but also in Spain, Hungary, and the Netherlands. In Austria, for instance, where the discourse appears rather articulated, the general frame is the existence of a 'male monoculture' or an 'old boys network' that deliberately acts to maintain existing power privileges for men excluding women and circumventing quota systems to appoint men. The fact that men see other men as reliable and keep appointing each others in higher posts is seen as a manifestation of this male 'monoculture'. Actors speaking are female politicians (mostly from the Green party) with a feminist background who express their views through the media.

Finally, among the weak diagnostic frames, there exists one that is definitely non feminist, i.e. the ‘women not making it in decision-making’ frame. Women are treated as problem holders and unable for politics. Men are implicitly the norm in decision-making and women are supposed to adapt to it: it is women, not men, who are and have a problem in politics and they, not men, must change. The discourse suggests the image of politics as a race of the fittest, in which women are asked to be like men if they want to fit. It is a discourse that makes women feel inadequate for politics, while men are treated as the norm of the ‘active’ citizen and can feel comfortably right. Although the frame is numerically weak and is explicitly expressed only by former EU Commissioner of Employment and Social Affairs Mr Pádraig Flynn, the discourse of women as problem holders is a general one.

Indeed, when considering the existing attribution of roles in the diagnosis of EU policy texts, it appears that women’s under representation in politics is described as a *problem for women*. Problem holders are women wanting to participate in politics and facing barriers. The problem is that women are lagging behind men as they do not achieve male positions in politics. Men are implicitly attributed a double normative standard: they are the norm to whom women should conform to and the group dominating power positions. However, men’s domination is not explicitly challenged. It is not men’s over-representation that is depicted as a problem, but female under-representation. Apart from the major reference to women, the EU texts in general contain no real or explicit attribution of roles as concerns problem-holders and particularly with respect to who has caused the problem: nobody appears as responsible for causing the problem. Abstract entities, such as traditions, patriarchy, majoritarian electoral systems, are often deemed responsible. In the EU prognostic frames women are also the main focus, but there are other indications about actors called upon to act: member states and governments, EU institutions, in particular the Commission, but also parties. Even with respect to the gender dimension of policy frames in both diagnosis and prognosis, women are the most mentioned social category addressed, or they are treated as subjects sharing a common identity, with the assumption that female representatives will defend women’s issues.

4.2 Gender inequality in politics: the prognosis of the problem

Prognostic frames on gender inequality in politics in the EU appear more articulated than diagnostic ones and in general texts are more unbalanced towards the prognosis of the problem. As in diagnosis, the emphasis here is on numbers: the solution of gender inequality in politics mainly lies in increasing the number of women. Why an equal number of women in politics should be an aim is scarcely debated. Similarly poor is the discussion on issues of justice, of representing women’s interests or needs, of creating a more women friendly politics. Frames can be grouped in four broad areas: ‘specific measures’, ‘change rules of the political game’, ‘defend a goal’, and ‘change gender policy and society’. Both the problem and its solution are located in the field of citizenship, that is in the organization of polity, politics and policies (e.g. political structures, political rules, the electoral system, political culture). Issues such as working hours of parliament and committees are rarely mentioned in the EU, only some countries refer to ‘politics as profession’ and to the organization of work as politicians.

The first area includes three frames that are dominant in the EU such as ‘quotas, target figures and positive actions’, ‘regulation/no regulation’ and ‘monitoring progress of women in politics’. All of them are expressed through the voices of the EU

institutions. Quotas are advocated for eligible party positions at the national level, though prevalent discourses in the EU focus on the need to meet target figures (e.g. a target figure of 40% for committees and expert groups). The EU also includes a series of general statements of intention on the need to focus on 'concrete targets' and a 'global integrated strategy' for improving equal representation, but it does not seem to specify what these concrete measures should consist of. Most discourses are in favour of positive actions, and not against quotas as in the case of some member states. The EU favours the regulation over the no regulation argument, arguing for the solution of the problem of women's under-representation through state legislation, rather than by 'natural development'. A definition of new legislation on parity democracy and a legal basis for equality in the treaty are mentioned in the EU, as well as policies and programmes to promote a gender-balanced decision-making. However, rhetoric prevails over the proposal of binding measures. The 'monitoring progress' frame very much characterises the EU approach, focusing on the need to collect data and monitor progress in the position of women in politics, in committees, and as candidates for election, in order to identify causes for their low representation and seek solutions. The approach is characterised by the development of indicators and benchmarking and is part of the gender mainstreaming strategy. It can also be considered as policy expertise, as it aims at establishing a pool of female policy experts, a 'women's talent bank', and intends to provide useful data for women candidates.

In the second area it is possible to find frames concerning the type of political rules that should be changed, as 'change polity' and 'change the rules of politics', the subjects who are supposed to take action, as in 'party responsibility', 'encourage women', 'women should act', and 'Europeanisation' frames, and the culture to modify, as in 'change political culture'. The frames on changing polity and the rules of politics suggest mechanisms to transform the legal system in particular electoral rules. It addresses 'structures' and 'institutions' that should be appropriate for the equal representation of women. Discourses mention a reform of the electoral system, sometimes to promote a proportional system, and the composition of candidate and voting lists with respect to the selection of an equal number of wo/men candidates on party lists for elections. Voices speaking are EU institutions, gender experts and the EWL. In spite of the structural transformation implied in the two frames, their occurrence is between less dominant and weak in the analysed texts.

With respect to who should act, a less dominant frame in the EU, present in the CWR and the EWL, assigns responsibility to parties to recruit more women and to create new eligibility and selection procedures. Once more the EU acts through 'soft' and persuasive, rather than binding, measures. More dominant is the 'encourage women' frame, expressed through the voice of the EU institutions, that is the idea that the state should encourage and support women in politics, by training and qualifying them. Although it reveals signs of a patronising attitude towards women, within this frame there are also more progressive elements. The training and information programmes for women candidates also contain elements fostering women's autonomy. A more feminist discourse is the reference to initiatives that increase women's empowerment and independence, and raise awareness towards new models of leadership that can be found in the Basque Country. A less frequent frame, mainly found in the CWR, is 'women should act', that suggests the idea that the female electorate should vote in European Elections and vote for women. The EWL also proposes a more women-friendly political citizenship. The frame 'Europeanisation', that lacks a correspondent frame in diagnosis, gives the EU a responsibility to act on the member states, though its action is based on 'soft' rather than binding measures. The

focus is on developing European guidelines and policies to promote a more balanced participation of women in the member states and in the EU institutions.

The ‘change political culture’ frame indicates that political culture is a problem for the representation of women and that it should be transformed, although an explicit diagnosis of the problem is absent. Action mostly consists in the introduction of awareness-raising and educational initiatives targeted at society, women, the public and the private sector. Soft measures proposed look vague and lack concreteness. Voices speaking here are EU institutions, female Ministers of the member states, and MEPs. A feminist frame that is not present in the EU prognosis and is very weak even in those countries where it is present is ‘change male political elite’. This is a paradigm shift in the prognosis towards changes in the political representation of men. However, this frame is very rare and can only be found in Austria, with a plea to men to renounce from power to bring more women in politics and a general appeal to change men, and in Spain, with only one reference to self-criticism concerning the existence of machismo within the party. The absence of the frame in the prognosis of EU texts reveals that the diagnostic frames of male domination and patriarchy are left with no solution.

The third area, ‘defend a goal’, includes the ‘general goals of policy on female representation’ prognostic frame, and the ‘democracy’ frame that is present only in the diagnosis of the problem but not in the prognosis. The first frame, spoken through policy makers’ voice, addresses the general goals of increasing women’s quantitative representation and presence in elected and decision-making bodies. This is expressed through the goals of gender balance, balanced participation/representation, and parity democracy. The concept of ‘balance’ is often mentioned without specifying what it means, only occasionally it is specified that it refers to a minimum share of 40%. The Netherlands and Spain also refer to a more balanced share of ‘power’ between the sexes. The infrequent mentioning of ‘power’ is significant, because politics is about power – but there seems to be poor consideration among policy makers both for this concept and for the connection between politics and gendered power relations. The goal of ‘democracy’ reveals some inconsistencies, as it is present in the EU diagnosis but not in prognosis. Framing the equal representation of women in terms of democracy could be a ‘strategic framing’ to legitimise the issue – because democracy is an unquestioned norm and aim. The absence of the democracy frame in prognosis could mean that the EU does not need appeals to democracy to promote women’s representation, as the political context is in favour of it. However, it can also indicate that the under-representation of women is not seen as a problem of or for democracy at the EU level.

The fourth area groups less dominant or weak frames that have in common the idea of changing gender policy and society, such as ‘change sexual division of labour’, ‘change societal inequality’, ‘Triangle of empowerment’ and ‘gender mainstreaming’. The ‘change sexual division of labour’ frame targets the existing division of labour between men and women that is seen as a precondition of women’s political under-representation. The EU predominantly focuses on reconciliation of work and family responsibilities, with reference also to flexible working hours and childcare. Women’s equal access to the labour market and the need to eliminate discrimination at work are also present in the EU discourse, as well as increasing the share of women in higher managerial positions. The ‘change societal inequality’ frame addresses the need to transform society to integrate equality in all spheres through a more structural change. The EU has a general discourse on a better re-organization of society that would increase choices and share benefits, through supporting and recognizing women’s role and the quality of women’s work. Although the emphasis on women as main actors in the reconciliation would not seem particularly feminist, the need for a structural

transformation that tackles the gender division of labour does show a broad concept of gender equality. However, the frames are rarely found and are expressed through the voice of gender advocates such as the CWR of the EP and gender experts.

The 'Triangle of empowerment' frame addresses the role of the so called 'velvet triangle' of women's policy agencies, politicians in cooperation with civil society and the women's movement. There is a weak discourse in the EU texts on the idea of an institutional cooperation with civil society and the women's movement, mainly limited to suggest the promotion of women's networks. As it is often the case with more feminist frames, voices speaking are those of the CWR and gender experts. Finally, 'gender mainstreaming' is a weak frame in the EU that is found only in the CWR and which does not have a corresponding frame in diagnosis. The strategy is mentioned, though the discourse seems to be rather vague and the emphasis is on non binding measures. The EU associates gender mainstreaming with indicators for follow-up, collecting data and gender specific statistics, the exchange of good practices and positive actions. Overall, gender mainstreaming appears like a procedural concept and an open signifier rather than the beginning of a radical transformation of policy process, actors, concepts, and gendered structures of power.

5 EU policy frames: family policies⁶

5.1 EU family policies: the diagnosis of the problem

On the whole, seven diagnostic frames can be found in EU family policy. The most frequent ones deal with reconciliation problems and women's access to the labour market, to be followed by a frame on the persistence of gender inequality. These frames tend to co-occur but none of them is dominant. In frequency they are to be followed by two frames on demographic changes and on changes undergone by families. A frame that was to be found only once deals with poverty. A final frame underlying some of the texts is that family policies fail. Contrary to gender inequalities in politics, the diagnostic frames in family policies are expressed by different EU institutions and experts on family policies alike, including the gender inequality frame.

In the case of EU family policies, reconciliation problems are mainly addressed as a shortage of affordable child care. This shortage and an ineffective reconciliation of work and care are not seen as a problem in itself but as an obstacle to women's higher participation in the labour market. The lack of childcare is an obstacle for women to achieve equality in employment, but the problem of reconciliation is also mentioned to have an impact on the sustainability of labour supply. The labour market frame is especially concerned with this supply side problems of the labour market, the need for sufficient labour force available in the right form. The fact that women carry the main burden of care is for instance conceived as being bad for companies and the economy. In the gender inequality frame the problem is mainly related to the fact that women face unequal chances on the labour market because of their care burden and of the labour market not being adapted to this reality (lack of flexible and part-time work). On the whole, the inequality frame in diagnosis is weakly articulated. It is limited to the observation that women face unequal opportunities without analysing the causes of this situation. It does not make a problem of the fact that it is women who carry the burden

⁶ This section partly draws on the following MAGEEQ research reports: van Beveren, Verloo and Meier 2004; Meier et al. 2005. For a list of the selection of EU texts on family policies that have been treated with frame analysis within the MAGEEQ project see Annex 1.

of reconciliation. Neither does diagnosis contain a thorough gender analysis, relating the situation of women to that of men. In some texts references to gender inequality are but of a rhetoric nature. The labour market frame neither makes men become a direct part of the picture, but women are linked to concepts of discrimination and of unequal opportunities. The reconciliation frame contains less of a normative undertone. In some cases the diagnosis underlines that reconciliation is a women's problem, in the sense that women carry the overall responsibility for care tasks. But the problem is not addressed as a lack of fathers' participation in care tasks or as that men and women do not equally share responsibilities in the home. Only one text indirectly constructs men as non-involved fathers, stating that they should be encouraged to become more involved as fathers. For the rest men are not addressed in diagnosis, except for one text stating that there is not enough support for women and men to reconcile work and care.

Next to these three main frames two frames regularly pop up without being central to the diagnosis. In the demographic decline frame the problem is the demographic change including a low fertility rate and the ageing of the population. The economy, the social security system, the pension system, etc. lack the necessary input to function well in the long run. This problem is mentioned in the margin of the labour market frame. Women tend to have less or no children because it hinders them to enter or to stay on the labour market. As most other frames, this one mainly addresses women. Men are seldom and only indirectly addressed. Because women carry the main burden of care they tend to opt for a professional career, which leads to a demographic deficit. Only a presentation at the European Observatory on Family Matters Annual Seminar explicitly relates women's and men's behaviour. The diagnosis reads that an imbalance in society is due to the lack of corresponding evolutions at macro and micro level. At a micro level women decide to participate to a larger extent on the labour market, which is not accommodated for at the macro level (lack of care facilities, flexible working conditions and financial support). This in turn provokes imbalances at the micro level, where men do not pick up care tasks.

Similarly, the fact that families undergo change is a frame mentioned in the margin, but without a clear co-occurrence with a particular frame. The problem is that families change: there is a decrease in the number of childbirths, there are changes in the family composition, there are more varied and complex types of family. In some cases the text presents the problem as a loss of family life and of the care-taking role of the family, in others this is but indirectly expressed through the mentioning that family life is important and impacts the quality of life. Some texts not only focus on the fact that families change, but that this is provoked by changes in society. A resolution by the EP (A4-004/1999) underlines that demographic, sociological, technological and scientific changes lead to the loss of family life and of the care-taking role the family fulfils. On the whole, causal analysis is missing, but this frame blames the erosion of families for all sorts of problems in society, such as criminality, violence in the family, or child abuse. Much of the analysis is implicit and contains a strong normative undertone. Families face trouble because they are no longer what they have been before, and what got lost are immaterial values: love, care, solidarity. On the whole, the frame is strongly degendered, with a focus on families and children. While in other frames the unit of focus is an individual, here it is a group. However, the frame goes hand in hand with pleas for supporting the families, meaning to help women manage to reconcile work and care. The degendered frame actually targets women and not the other members of a family.

Contrary to EU member states such as Austria and Hungary, where family policies frequently address issues of poverty, only one speech by Commissioner for

Employment and Social Affairs, Anna Diamantopoulou, at a seminar on families in 2001 mentioned this frame. She refers to the problem of poverty and of social exclusion, but not in a thoroughly reflected manner as was found in Austrian or Hungarian texts. Her speech further mainly refers to the reconciliation problem, thereby indirectly relating poverty to problems for participation in the labour market. The focus is on women, although the Commissioner speaks of the needs of workers with children.

Finally, a couple of texts contain an underlying diagnosis referring to a problem of failing family policies. This failure is due to the fact that existing policies do not sufficiently solve the problem, reducing it in this case to a reconciliation problem. Family policies are also thought to fail because they have a low overall status and the EU plays no role in this field. In the last case, the success of economic and social policies is argued to be affected by family arrangements and conditions. It is at this level that family policies could intervene and impact on broader policies, explaining the importance of not only families but also family policies. Hence, the implicit underlying problem is the lack of grip on families necessary to control economic or social evolutions.

In sum, whether the diagnostic frames in family policies are degendered or not, much the same as with the previous topic of gender inequality in politics, the focus is on women. The problem is located with women, they face it and, even though this is often not explicitly articulated, they cause it. Women face the problems of reconciliation or of unequal chances on the labour market, but similarly women cause the demographic deficit because they opt for less or no children and women's too low participation in the labour market is part of the problem of insufficient labour supply. Men are not addressed in the problem construction. They are not really considered to face a problem, nor are they really considered to be responsible for it. The texts miss a broader gender and in this respect feminist perspective. They tend to reproduce traditional gender regimes. Contrary to the diagnostic frames in gender inequality in politics, the problem is not located with abstract entities. The only exception is the failing policies frame, where the problem holders are policy-makers, due to their lack of grip on families. On the whole, role attribution in diagnosis is weak.

5.2 EU family policies: the prognosis of the problem

Contrary to the topic of gender inequality in politics, EU family policies focus on diagnosis rather than on prognosis. This might be due to a difference in topics, but it certainly also has to do with the fact that family policies is no EU but a member state competence. Nonetheless, except for the poverty frame and the one on failing family policies⁷, all frames found in diagnosis have a twin frame in prognosis, though they do not necessarily co-occur in the same text. Similarly to diagnosis frames are articulated by different types of actors alike.

The most frequently found frame in prognosis deals with reconciliation issues, and here it occurs more dominantly than in diagnosis. The focus is on an improved reconciliation of work and care. The accent can be on the development of facilities alleviating care tasks, which allows women or people fulfilling these tasks in the private sphere to take up paid employment. In this case prognosis mainly focuses on the organisation of intimacy, for instance through a provision of sufficient childcare. The emphasis can also be on how the labour market should look like in order to be in line

⁷ It could be argued that all frames found in prognosis are an answer to the failing family policies frame found in diagnosis (Meier et al. 2005).

with care responsibilities. Here measures focus on parental leave, but also on a harmonisation of work and school hours or a protection of families against stressful working conditions and long working hours, in sum on the organisation of labour. In both cases, reconciliation is mainly constructed as a women's issue. Women are encouraged to fulfil their roles as both mothers and workers. The working mother is the ideal and women are depicted as an undifferentiated category. There is a strong tendency to perpetuate traditional gender role patterns. In several texts men are addressed, but only one underlines that men should be encouraged to join the care force, leaving it at such a soft formulation and without going into details on how this should be achieved. Men are not addressed beyond a rhetoric level.

The labour market frame contains a similar discourse but a different underlying motivation. The emphasis is on the requirements of the labour market, rather than on allowing women to combine various tasks in everyday life. The frame is not interested in the conditions under which women enter the labour market. The Council Directive on the framework agreement on part-time work is for instance more oriented towards the requirements of flexibility and competition than towards the promotion of equal opportunities between the sexes, even though it is presented as the need to no longer discriminate between part-time and full-time workers. Much the same as in the reconciliation frame, women are described as a homogeneous group sharing the same interests and needs, which is their (re)integration into the labour market. Men are completely absent. The labour market frame is entirely located in the organisation of labour, all changes focus on the organisation of the labour market.

Similar to diagnosis, a gender equality frame co-occurs with the reconciliation and the labour market frame. The discourse looks similar as the one found in the reconciliation frame, but with the underlying idea that what is important is the promotion of equality. It is defined as a balanced participation of men and women in family and work and no longer focuses on women's position in the labour market as it does in diagnosis. When looking more into detail the gender equality frame hardly differs from the reconciliation frame because men are no integral part of the picture. Enhance women's employment, fight the discrimination of part-time workers (meaning women), allow them to reconcile are typical issues. At a rhetoric level it means to enhance gender equality. However, the underlying idea is very much to raise women to the level of men, not to raise men to the level of women, notwithstanding the rhetoric. The Resolution of the Council and of the Ministers for Employment and Social Policy, meeting within the Council on the balanced participation of women and men in family and working life of June 2000 could be seen as focusing on gender equality in a more thorough way. It addresses both men and women and underlines the need for changes in structures and attitudes in order to achieve a balanced participation of men and women in family and work. But this is not translated to concrete measures and therefore genuine gender equality is limited to rhetoric. The focus is not on socially constructed gender roles and no concrete attention is paid to the sharing of care in the organisation of intimacy or to the male norm in the organisation of labour.

Next to these three main frames in prognosis, both a demographic frame and a frame focusing on help for families occur marginally. The demographic frame only occurs in an expert report discussing the low fertility in Europe. Its bottom line is that low fertility rates should be changed. The solutions mentioned for the low birth rates are multiple. Women should be encouraged to have children, and especially to have them earlier. But there need also be an environment favourable for having children. There should be marriage and relationship support, a development of positive social attitudes towards children and parenting, including measures taken both at the level of the labour

market and in the organisation of intimacy: flexible work, part-time work, care facilities, subsidised services and goods, but also a sharing of care between women and men. Although an argument is that the rhythm of society makes it difficult for people to have the basic requirements for founding a family, much of the underlying idea is simply that women will have children when this has fewer implications for their participation in the labour market. In this respect the demographic frame comes close to the labour market frame. Again, men are mainly encouraged to take up care tasks. The report addresses the need to recognise and support fathers as parents and refers to both maternity and paternity leave, but part-time and flexible working patterns are mainly targeted at women. As in the other frames, the extent to which work and care are communicating vessels, the more time is put in one the less is left for the other, is only recognised with regards to women. Men are encouraged to pick up care, but except for vague references to paternity leave there is no mention of what this implies for their participation in the labour market.

A final frame found in prognosis addresses the fact that families need support and protection. Families should be helped to perform their function, family based life styles should be placed centre stage, they should not be marginalized and isolated. In this frame a family is always defined as having children or as wanting to have children, need and support are centred around this reproductive function. In this respect this frame comes close to the demographic frame. The focus is thereby clearly on a better provision of services families need in everyday life, with a focus on the combination of paid and unpaid work and how this can be regulated in the labour market. But it is also on the fostering of values favourable to having children and a family life. Most of the frame is formulated in a gender-neutral language, but it contains a strong gender bias given the particular focus on women when it comes to who should be supported and how this interface between the combination of family and of the rest of society is to be articulated. Men are less frequently addressed and when this is the case, this is again in terms of rights and not of duties.

Similar to diagnosis, prognosis mainly focuses on women. Measures meant to solve problems articulated in family policies are targeted at women, the bottom line being that women should be enabled to reconcile work and care. They need a couple of material conditions to be able to do so, child care, financial support and a labour market being adapted to their availability. Men taking over care is marginally part of these material conditions, but men are addressed to a very limited extent and only in vague terms. They should be allowed or stimulated to pick up care tasks, but no allusion is made to what this implies for men with regard to their participation in the labour market. On the whole, prognosis very much as diagnosis lacks a broader gender and in this respect feminist perspective. Again, traditional gender regimes are reproduced and not challenged, notwithstanding the rethoric. Significant in this context is the shift in the equality frame from diagnosis to prognosis. While gender inequality in diagnosis addresses women's discrimination and lack of equal opportunities in the labour market, prognosis looks at how they could reconcile work and care thanks to part-time and flexible jobs. Texts no longer address the issue of how this will lead to gender equality in the labour market.

6 Frame inconsistencies and competing premises: implications for gender mainstreaming⁸

The analysis of policy frames reveals the existence of inconsistencies in the framing of policies, ambiguities in the aims and effects of measures, and competing premises. A first inconsistency is that the relation between diagnostic and prognostic frames is unbalanced. Gender inequality in politics is unbalanced towards prognosis. One of the consequences we can draw from it is that solutions are provided without a thorough analysis of the diagnosis of the situation of gender inequality in politics. This could indicate that measures proposed are only a partial answer to the complex reality of the problem and that, to be more effective in problem-solving, policies would require a more comprehensive diagnosis of the problem of gender inequality in politics. The reasons for a poor diagnosis could be due either to the lack of knowledge on the part of policy makers (in spite of the consistent corpus of literature already existing on the issue), or to the lack of political will to provide a more articulated diagnosis that would challenge existing gender power hierarchies. In family policies the situation is inverted, there is more attention for diagnosis than for prognosis. As mentioned before, this might partly be due to the lack of competence of the EU in these matters, but it might also reveal that approaching a policy problem is not necessarily seen as involving a prognosis matching with the diagnosis of the problem at stake. In any case we can conclude that policy documents lack consistency in this respect.

Another inconsistency is that even where policy documents focus on both prognosis and diagnosis, they do not necessarily address what we could call twin frames. In family policies for instance, frames found in diagnosis have a twin frame in prognosis (there is a reconciliation problem, solve it; women do not sufficiently participate in the labour market, make more women participate in it; there is a demographic deficit, solve it; etc). The same goes to a large extent for gender inequalities in politics, although there are exceptions (the diagnostic frame on the problem of male domination and patriarchy has no twin frame in prognosis, the same goes for democracy). Even though in the majority of policy documents diagnostic and prognostic twin frames can be found, this does not go for all texts. For instance, in three of the eleven documents on family policies there is no co-occurrence of twin frames, and in only one the twin frames of all frames found in diagnosis were also found in prognosis. Furthermore, at first sight twin frames do not necessarily form an entirely consistent entity. This is for instance shown by the gender (in)equality frame in family policies shifting the focus from women's discrimination in the labour market to how they could reconcile work and care through part-time and flexible jobs. Even if these at first sight twin frames are found in diagnosis and prognosis, the solution does not address the initially articulated problem, which adds inconsistency at yet another level.

The lack of consistency and the existence of competing premises is particularly relevant for understanding the potential dangers in the implementation of policy measures. The issue of gender inequality in politics is mainly articulated as a quantitative one, but this can take us in opposing directions. Quotas are effective in highering the number of women and in challenging male power positions, as the reaction against positive actions within the EU institutions has shown (Stratigaki forthcoming). In this sense they are a feminist solution to the problem, as it is argued in the third shift of a feminist definition of gender mainstreaming (see section 2).

⁸ This section elaborates on the following MAGEEQ research reports: Lombardo, Jalusic, Pantelidou, and Sauer 2005; Meier et al. 2005.

However, a mere focus on numbers could have the effect of de-gendering and de-politicising the issue, treating it as a problem of achieving target figures, rather than changing power relations. In this sense, the effect could be the opposite of feminist, as a number-driven solution only focuses on sex, not on gender. In diagnosis, the major problem of gender inequality in politics seems to be the physical absence of women. Gender in this case is reduced to sex, a dichotomous category in which men and women are opposed on the basis of their biological characteristics. Also the solution, i.e. increasing the number of female representatives, is mainly based on sex. This framing of the issue does not take into account gender as a socially constructed and interrelational category of men and women having different social experiences, interests and needs, that are shaped by factors such as their respective positions in the division of labour. Although social structures play a role in the way in which both problem and solution are represented in EU texts on gender inequality in politics, there appears to be a gap between the political dimension, that essentially focuses on sex, and the social dimension that takes gender into account⁹. Furthermore, the absence of a prognostic frame about 'changing male political elite' in the EU texts creates a potential conflict with the dominant prognostic frame on 'increasing the number of women' through quotas and positive actions. The absence of a parallel discourse on the changes to the male political elite required for 'letting' more women enter in elected and decision-making bodies, shows that, although male domination and patriarchy are seen as problems, no appeal to male change is made. The absence of a prognostic frame on changing male political elite in the EU texts is even more significant considering that there exists a diagnostic frame about the problem of male domination and patriarchy, though it is weak and only expressed by gender advocates.

All of the previous brings us to the fact that the documents in both policy issues mainly focus on women, and if they pay attention to men, they do it differently. Gender inequality in politics contains a dominant framing of women as the main problem-holders and men as the implicit or explicit norm group. A strong frame about men causing or even holding the problem of gender inequality in politics does not exist. Furthermore, ambiguous is the message to 'encourage women', that on the one hand provides women with resources for entering politics, and, on the other hand reveals a patronising idea that women need encouragement and support, while men do not need training and information on the causes of male domination in politics, its effects on women, and the development of more gender equal attitudes. How will a change in existing gender roles take place if men are not explicitly required to change? Moreover, since men are implicitly attributed a double normative standard, being the norm to whom women should conform to and the group dominating power positions, the premises that may allow to challenge such power appear rather weak. Even more so when women are framed as subjects 'not making it in politics', in which case they even lack the quality of the 'male active citizen' to initiate a process of change in the frequent cases in which they are framed both as problem-holders and problem-solvers.

In family policies, too, the focus is on women, but men are less framed as a norm group. They are actually left out of the picture. It is women who face a problem of reconciliation, which is often the bottom line problem in family policies, itself feeding other problems such as the demographic deficit, a lack of labour force supply, changes at the level of family life and functioning. The problem is not approached from a gender perspective, in the sense that reconciliation might be a problem for all parents, both men and women. Even more, reconciliation is a problem of a lack of infrastructure, not of the

⁹ See Lombardo, Jalusic, Pantelidou, and Sauer 2005.

gendered distribution of tasks in the sphere of intimacy. Men and the gendered relations between men and women are no part of the diagnosis. Furthermore, prevailing gender roles are not put into question but tend to be confirmed by a focus on how women could better reconcile work and care. It could be argued that a realistic perception of the issue of reconciliation by policy-makers involves the observation that part of the problem consists in the fact that women carry the burden of care. But there is a difference between this being an observation of how society functions or this being accepted as the norm. A gender approach would involve that once it comes to prognosis, this burden of care carried by women should no longer be assumed as being the norm. Instead it should include a reflection on how the share of the burden women carry relies to norms, values, etc. EU family policy documents do allude to men, mentioning here and there the issue of a balance of men and women in work and care, and once even the need for a change of structures. But they leave it at a very vague formulation and do not frame the rest of the diagnosis in accordance to this, let alone, policy measures or roles in prognosis.

In this respect EU documents on family policies, and to a large extent this also goes for the issue of gender inequality in politics, are actually gender-blind. They do not address the concept of gender, they limit diagnosis and prognosis to a primary focus on women as a social category – and generally on women as a homogenous social category. And if gender is addressed, then this is done at a simplistic level. In the women's qualitative representation frame for instance, one of the arguments of why the under-representation of women is a problem is their lacking qualitative representation. Many EU policy texts analysed explicitly or implicitly suggest that if women are not present in politics, women's interests are not represented, and policy outcomes will not be women friendly. The documents do not distinguish between 'standing for' and 'acting for' and often assume that the low number of women is responsible for the fact that women's interests are not represented and that policy outcomes are not women-friendly¹⁰. The underlying assumption is that quantitative representation would by default lead to qualitative representation of women. However, gender literature on the issue conceives the idea of women's common identity as women as controversial, particularly with respect to representational issues (see for instance Young 2000; Phillips 1995). Only the European Women's Lobby recognises in one text the problematic assumption of women's essential identity as women.

In sum, gender, as a social construction and as a social construction of not only women but also men is generally left out of the picture. In this respect there is neither a holistic approach of gender tackling the multiple interconnected causes which create an unequal relation between the sexes to the disadvantage of women and the role of men in it. A first shift required by a feminist reading of gender mainstreaming can therefore not be found in the EU documents on family policies or on gender inequality in politics.

The first shift to a feminist reading of gender mainstreaming would also involve a move to substantive equality. However, EU documents on family policies do not involve a move towards gender equality but limit themselves to the issue of equal opportunities. Even more, notwithstanding the rethoric, they reproduce and consolidate women's roles and responsibilities as primary care givers. The gender equality frame for instance focuses on equal opportunities and mainly addresses gender relations in the organisation of the sphere of labour. It is not concerned about gender relations in the organisation of the sphere of intimacy, except for some vague allusions. The limited focus of gender equality to an equal opportunities approach in the labour market

¹⁰ See Lombardo, Jalusic, Pantelidou, and Sauer 2005.

facilitates a prominent focus on a non feminist perception of the reconciliation issue. Actually, while the reconciliation frame and the labour market frame are of real political priority, the gender equality frame fulfils a more rhetoric or strategic function. Ambiguities also appear in policy frames found in the issue of gender inequality in politics. In the labour market frame related to that policy topic the lack of women in decision-making is interpreted as negative for the labour market as it is a waste of human resources. This utilitarian discourse can be a ‘strategic framing’ of the issue to make it more acceptable in non feminist environments, but it can also de-gender the issue, since the goal is an efficiently functioning labour market rather than the achievement of gender equality. The premises for both goals, an efficient labour market and a gender equal society, can be competing.

On the whole, there is no shift to genuine substantive equality, and it is certainly not prioritised in the entire setting of family policies or in the field of gender inequality of politics. For the latter, the lack of priority of gender equality appears in the rhetoric not accompanied by binding measures, as it is the case for prognostic frames about quotas, targets, regulation, change political culture and even Europeanisation, where the EU is supposed to act on member states but not through binding measures. For EU family policies it could even be stated that this policy field is more concerned about macroeconomic issues than about gender equality issues. Or to put it differently, in the framework of EU family policy gender equality is at the service of macroeconomic needs. In this respect, gender equality objectives are not prioritised among competing issues, referring to shifts two and four required by a feminist reading of gender mainstreaming. Both the diagnosis and the prognosis found in EU documents related to family policies reveal that the issue is generally not of gender (in)equality but a demographic, economic or social concern. And whenever there are competing policy objectives, the issue of gender equality loses the battle.

Nonetheless, there is a slight difference between the issue of gender inequality in politics and family policies. In the former case there are a number of frames that we could name ‘feminist’ on the basis of the definition provided for in section two, as they hint at the first shift towards a broader concept of gender equality and a focus on gender, at the second shift on incorporating a gender perspective in the mainstream agenda, and at the fifth shift in institutional and organisational culture concerning gender expertise, the use of tools, and cooperation with civil society. But they do not touch upon the third shift on equal representation and the fourth shift in the priority given to gender objectives in terms of binding measures. It is significant, however, that the majority of these ‘feminist’ frames are weak in terms of occurrence and come from the voices of gender advocates, particularly the CWR of the EP and gender experts. In diagnosis we find frames such as ‘electoral system’ and ‘failure of institutional measures’ that focus on the women unfriendliness of the polity and the political structure, deepening the analysis on structural obstacles to women’s political representation. These match with prognostic frames proposing a structural transformation of polity and electoral rules. We also find reference to a more global approach to gender inequality that sees the ‘gender division of labour’ and the ‘lack of social infrastructures’ as obstacles for women in politics, and to the reverse side of female under-representation, that is ‘patriarchy and male domination’. Evidence of the fifth shift in the policy process, mechanisms and actors is provided in the frames ‘monitoring progress of women in politics’ and ‘triangle of empowerment’. While the latter concerns the need of an institutional cooperation with civil society and the women’s movement, the former focuses on tools such as data disaggregated by sex needed to make a diagnosis of women’s situation in politics and take solutions.

However, feminist frames are not immune from inconsistencies. For instance, the diagnostic frame on the existence of ‘male domination’ does not offer a corresponding solution, the prognostic frame on ‘change division of labour’ focuses on women as main actors of reconciliation while men are absent, and the prognostic frames on ‘change societal inequality’ and ‘party responsibility’ sound rhetorical as no concrete measures are proposed. Finally, the weak prognostic frame on ‘gender mainstreaming’ treats the strategy like an open signifier mainly concerned with procedural matters that do not challenge in any way a hierarchical gender distribution of power. Despite their rarity and inconsistencies, feminist frames on gender inequality in politics are present in the EU policy documents and they rely on the gender expertise of actors who have a voice in the EU institutional context. Nevertheless, EU documents on family policies do not contain similar frames revealing a shift to a feminist reading of gender mainstreaming. This shows that even explicitly gendered policy issues are not necessarily framed in a feminist way, and are on the contrary not necessarily immune to the pitfalls of simplistic readings of gender and to gender stereotypes.

Concluding remarks

The starting point of our argument is that the impact that gender mainstreaming can have on the construction of a more gender equal society depends on the way in which it is interpreted, that is the extent to which feminist interpretations make their way through the political debate. Gender mainstreaming is an open signifier that can be filled with both feminist and non feminist content. Thus, we provide a feminist definition of gender mainstreaming based on five shifts (see section 2) to explore the extent to which a move towards gender mainstreaming, and towards a feminist definition of it in particular, is taking place in the EU. We are aware that gender mainstreaming as a strategy is not per definition based on the premises underlying these shifts, besides it can be based on various premises. The analysis carried out in this paper presents evidence of the existence of inconsistencies and competing policy frames even in gendered areas such as family policies and gender inequality in policy. Moreover, the frame analysis reveals that in the EU texts on these areas there is almost no shift towards the adoption of gender mainstreaming, and not towards a feminist definition of it. In none of the two policy areas analysed there is evidence of shifts one, two, and four towards a feminist definition of gender mainstreaming: there is neither a shift towards a broader concept of gender equality and a focus on gender and not only on women, nor a shift towards the incorporation of a gender perspective in the agenda capable of challenging power hierarchies and reorient policy ends and means, nor a sign that gender equality objectives have been prioritised.

The third shift towards an equal representation of wo/men is present in the area of gender inequality in politics, as quantitative representation of women is the most occurrent frame, but it is absent in family policies, where no strong reference is made to the equal involvement of wo/men in the family and no reference is made to the equal representation of wo/men in all labour market areas and at all hierarchical levels. The fifth shift implying changes in the policy process, mechanisms, and actors is marginally touched by the feminist frame on the ‘triangle of empowerment’ of gender inequality in politics, and dominant only with respect to the collection of data to monitor progress of women in politics. It is significant that the only two shifts that are present, though only in one issue and in limited terms, are shifts three and five, the former dealing with

numbers, and the latter focusing on data on women's progress (but not on gender expertise, gender impact, and cooperation with civil society and women's movement). It can indicate that the shift towards gender mainstreaming that is taking place tends to privilege more 'simple' and 'self-evident' issues like numbers ('easy' issues that require no particular knowledge on gender), rather than more complex and potentially controversial issues such as the challenging of power hierarchies, gender roles, and political agenda that are required by shifts one, two and four. Numbers and data are important, but a mere quantitative shift not supported by shifts in power, concepts and political priorities may risk causing a negative retroactive effect on the goal of gender equality, as the change required is much more complex than a shift in numbers may suggest. In this sense, policy-makers seem to lack political will or/and a broader knowledge about theory of gender inequality and tend to offer limited and easy solutions to complex problems.

Evidence of a non feminist reading of both policy areas can also be found in the framing of the issues as a problem for women, and often one that women are supposed to solve, while men are not part of the problem, nor problem causers, nor are they asked to change. Needless to say that if only women are targeted and not gender, and men are left out of the picture, the major change that a feminist reading of gender mainstreaming could achieve will instead be minimal.

We can draw different implications from this analysis. First, gender mainstreaming in itself is an open signifier that can be filled with both feminist and non feminist meanings. Thus, it is important to make premises about policy-makers' interpretation of gender (in)equality more explicit to minimise ambiguities at the implementing stage. Second, if gender mainstreaming is not framed in a feminist way, and almost not framed at all, even in gendered issues such as family policies and gender inequality in politics, meagre results are to be expected from its application to non gendered policy areas. Third, the fact that inconsistencies appear in all frames, even in the most feminist ones articulated by gender policy experts, should make us reflect on the more or less implicit gender bias reflected in the policy formulation of gender equality policies, to avoid that the latter may fall in the trap of being infiltrated by sexist prejudices, as for instance the attribution of the problem to women only and the absence of a call for change in men. Furthermore, the awareness of such inconsistencies can be a powerful tool for sharpening the formulation of gender policies. This could help policy-makers to avoid, for instance, the formulation of policies unbalanced towards the solution that do not make a thorough diagnosis of the problem, or that provide a more comprehensive diagnosis of the problem but then give solutions that contribute to perpetuate traditional gender roles, or whose goal is different from the achievement of a gender equal society. Finally, the fact that the few feminist frames found are linked to the voice of gender advocates inside and outside the EU institutions should make us think of how we can make these voices even stronger and how we can give voice to the absent women's movement.

Bibliography

- Bacchi, Carol L. 1999. *Women, policy and politics. The construction of policy problems*. London: Sage.
- Behning, Ute and Amparo Serrano Pascual. 2001. 'Rethinking the Gender Contract? Gender Mainstreaming in the European Employment Strategy. In Emilio Gabaglio and Reiner Hoffmann eds. *European Trade Union Yearbook 2000*. Brussels: ETUI.
- Beveridge, Fiona, Sue Nott and Kylie Stephen. 2000. 'Mainstreaming and Engendering of Policy-making: a Means to an End?' . *Journal of European Public Policy, Special Issue: Women, Power and Public Policy in Europe*. Guest ed. Sonia Mazey, vol. 7, n. 3: 385-405.
- Braithwaite, Mary. 1999. *Mainstreaming Equal Opportunities into the Structural Funds: How Regions in Germany, France and the United Kingdom are Putting into Practice the New Approach*. Final Report of the Survey of Current Practice and Findings of the Seminar at Gelsenkirchen. January 21-22. Report Produced for the European Commission, DG Regional Policy and Cohesion, April.
- Council of Europe. 1998. *Conceptual Framework, Methodology and Presentation of Good Practices: Final Report of Activities of the Group of Specialists on Mainstreaming (EG-S-MS)*. Strasbourg, Section on Equality between Women and Men, Directorate of Human Rights.
- Hafner-Burton, Emilie and Mark A. Pollack. 2000. 'Mainstreaming Gender in the European Union'. *Journal of European Public Policy, Special Issue: Women, Power and Public Policy in Europe*. Guest ed. Sonia Mazey, vol. 7, n. 3: 432-56.
- Jacquot, Sophie. 2003. 'Sequences of policy change : European gender equality policies and the emergence of the gender mainstreaming principle, 1989-1996'. ECPR General Conference, Marburg, 18-21 September.
- Jahan, Rounaq. 1995. *The Elusive Agenda: Mainstreaming Women in Development*. London: Zed Books.
- Lombardo, Emanuela. 2005. 'Mainstreaming Gender Equality in the European Constitution-making Process'. *The Making of the European Constitution*, Houndmills: Palgrave-MacMillan.
- Lombardo, Emanuela, Vlasta Jalusic, Maro Pantelidou, and Birgit Sauer. 2005. *Comparative Frame Analysis: Gender Inequality in Politics. The European Union, Austria, Spain, Greece, Hungary, Slovenia and The Netherlands*. Vienna: IWM.
- Lombardo, Emanuela. 2003. 'Integrating or Setting the Agenda? Gender Mainstreaming in the two European Conventions on the Future of the EU and the Charter of Fundamental Rights'. ECPR General Conference. Marburg, 18-21 September.

- Meier, Petra. Forthcoming. 'Implementing gender equality: the gap between theoretical prerequisites and daily practice'. In S. Hellsten, A. M. Holli, K. Daskalova, eds. *Women's Political Participation and Citizenship in Europe*. New York: Palgrave.
- Meier et al. 2005. *Frame Description and Critical Analysis: Family Policy*. Vienna: IWM.
- Meier et al. Forthcoming. 'Women in political decision-making and gender mainstreaming: obvious partners?', *The Greek Review of Social Research (Special issue on Gender Mainstreaming and Equality Policy Frames)*. Available on www.mageeq.net.
- Meier, Petra and Marjolein Paantjens. 2004. Updated Preliminary Report on the European Union: Political Participation. Vienna: IWM.
- Phillips, Anne. 1995. *The Politics of Presence*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rubery, Jill and Colette Fagan. 2000. *Gender Impact Assessment and European Employment Strategy*. Manchester: EWER/UMIST.
- Stratigaki, Maria (2005) 'Gender Mainstreaming vs Positive Action: An on-going Conflict in EU Gender Equality Policy'. *European Journal of Women's Studies*. 12: 165-186.
- Triandafyllidou, Anna and Anastasios Fotiou. 1998. 'Sustainability and Modernity in the European Union: A Frame Theory Approach to Policy-Making'. *Sociological Research Online*, vol. 3, no. 1. <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/3/1/2.html>
- Van Beveren, Jacintha L.M. and Mieke Verloo. 2004. *Updated Preliminary Report on the European Union: Family Policy*. Vienna: IWM.
- Verloo, Mieke. 2004. 'Mainstreaming Gender Equality in Europe. A Frame Analysis Approach'. Conference of the Europeanists in Chicago. 11-13 March. Forthcoming in *The Greek Review of Social Research (Special issue on Gender Mainstreaming and Equality Policy Frames)*. Available on www.mageeq.net.
- Verloo, Mieke. 2001. 'Another Velvet Revolution? Gender mainstreaming and the politics of implementation'. *IWM Working Paper No. 5/2001*. Vienna: IWM.
- Walby, Sylvia. 2004. 'Gender mainstreaming: Productive tensions in theory and practice'. ESRC Gender Mainstreaming Seminars, Leeds.
- Walby, Sylvia, 1990. *Theorizing Patriarchy*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Young, Iris Marion. 2000. *Inclusion and Democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Annex 1: List of selected texts on EU gender inequality in politics and family policies and reference to other European countries' texts

EU documents on gender inequality in politics:

- 1) Dublin speech Flynn: Keynote speech by Mr Pádraig Flynn, European Commissioner for Social Affairs and Employment
- 2) 1995 Council Resolution: Council Resolution of 27 March 1995 on the balanced participation of men and women in decision-making, OJ C168 4.7.1995
- 3) Charter of Rome: Charter of Rome on “women for the renewal of politics and society”
- 4) EP Elec Systems: Garcia Munoz, Victoria and Emily Carey (1997) Differential Impact of Electoral Systems on Female Political Representation. Women’s Rights Series 10. European Parliament: Luxembourg.
- 5) Create Gender Balance: Leyenaar, Monique (1997) How to Create a Gender Balance in Political Decision-Making. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- 6) Election Brochure: European Election Brochure “Europe for women, women for Europe”, prepared by European Commission DG V, in co-operation with the Women’s Rights Committee of the European Parliament
- 7) EWL newsletter 99: European Women’s Lobby Newsletter July 1999, special edition: New European Parliament, A new Commission – How much will women benefit?
- 8) Finnish Presidency report: Finnish Presidency report to the Council on ‘Women in the decision-making process’ in the Member States and the European Institutions, 22 October 1999
- 9) EP Resolution 3.2000: European Parliament resolution on women in decision-making, 2 March 2000 B5-0180/2000 OJ C346/82
- 10) EWL Recommendation: European Women Lobby recommendation on “Women in decision-making”, 22 May 2000
- 11) Commission Report recommendation 96/694: Report from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee on the implementation of Council recommendation 96/694 of 2 December 1996 on the balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process (OJ L391), COM(2000)120
- 12) July 2000 Commission Communication: Communication from the Commission of 7 July 2000 addressed to Member States on the Commission Decision relating to a gender balance within the committees and expert groups established by it
- 13) Report Commission Report: European Parliament Committee on Women’s Rights and Equal Opportunities’ report on the Commission report on the implementation of Council Recommendation 96/694 of 2nd December 1996 on the balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process (COM(2000) 120 – C5-0210/2000 – 2000/2117(COS))
- 14) EP debate 96/694 report: European Parliament plenary debate on balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process (COM(2000) 120 – C5-0210/2000 – 2000/2117(COS))
- 15) EWL Lobbying kit: European Women’s Lobby Lobbying Kit European Elections 2004. Have we got the balance right?

- 16) Report Election 2004: European Parliament Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities' report on Election 2004: How to ensure balanced representation of women and men A5-0333/2003.

EU documents on family policies:

- 1) Council recommendation on childcare (March 31, 1992)
- 2) Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the European Union (1996)
- 3) COUNCIL DIRECTIVE 96/34/EC on the framework agreement on parental leave concluded by UNICE, CEEP and the ETUC (June 3, 1996)
- 4) Council Directive 97/81/EC concerning the Framework Agreement on part-time work concluded by UNICE, CEEP and the ETUC (December 15, 1997)
- 5) Resolution on the protection of families and children (A4-0004/1999)
- 6) Resolution of the Council and of the Ministers for Employment and Social Policy, meeting within the Council on the balanced participation of women and men in family and working life (June 29, 2000)
- 7) Council Decision of December 2000 establishing a Programme relating to the Community framework strategy on gender equality (2001-2005)
- 8) Low fertility, families and public policies, Synthesis Report, Annual Seminar, Seville, Spain (September 15-16 2000)
- 9) Young People and Children in EU Policies. Closing Statement on Behalf of Anna Diamantopoulou. Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs (Speech for the seminar on Family Forms and the Young generation in Europe, Milan, Italy), (September 20-22, 2001)
- 10) Family Benefits and Family Policies in Europe (European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs, Unit E.2), (June 2002)
- 11) Family life in Europe, results of recent surveys on Quality of Life in Europe, speech of Hubert Krieger (May 13-14, 2004)

Annex 2: List of sensitising questions that structure a ‘supertext’

SUPERTEXT TEMPLATE

Full title

(In English and in original language)

Country / Place

Issue (main issue, detail if necessary)

Date

Type/status of document

Actor(s) and gender of actor(s) if applicable

Audience

Event / reason / occasion of appearance

Parts of text eliminated

Voice

SUMMARY

Voice(s) speaking

Perspective

References: words/ concepts (and where they come from)

References: actors

References: documents

Other references: events etc.

Form (argumentation / style / conviction techniques / dichotomies / metaphors / contrasts)

Diagnosis

SUMMARY

What is represented as the problem? To what extent is gender part of it?

Why is it seen as a problem?

Causality (what is seen as a cause of what?)

Dimensions of gender (social categories / identity / behaviour / norms & symbols / institutions/other)

Intersectionality (class, ethnicity, race, age, sexual preference, etc)

Mechanisms (resources /norms & interpretations / legitimisation of violence; gendered/de-gendered?)

Location (organisation of labour / organisation of intimacy / organisation of citizenship)

Attribution of roles in diagnosis

SUMMARY

Who is seen as responsible for causing the problem?

Problem holders (whose problem is it seen to be? Active/passive roles, perpetrators/victims, etc?)

Normativity (what is a norm group if there is a problem group?)

Legitimisation of non-problem(s)

Prognosis

SUMMARY

What to do? Which action is deemed necessary and why?

Hierarchy / priority in goals.

How to achieve goals (strategy / means / instruments)?

Dimensions of gender (social categories / identity / behaviour / norms & symbols / institutions)

Intersectionality (class, ethnicity, race, age, sexual preference, etc)

Mechanisms (resources / norms & interpretations / violence)

Location (organisation of labour / intimacy / citizenship)

Attribution of roles in prognosis

SUMMARY

Call for action

Call for non-action

Who is acted upon? (target groups)

Boundaries set to action and legitimisation of non-action

Normativity

SUMMARY

What is seen as ideal/preferred (institution/state of affairs/way of doing things/persons)?

What is seen as bad/detrimental, whether institution, state of affairs, way of doing things or persons?

Location of norms in the text (diagnosis / prognosis / elsewhere)

Balance

SUMMARY

Emphasis on different dimensions / elements

Frictions or contradictions within dimensions / elements

Comments