

# Political topics for the European Feminist Forum 2008

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The three important issue areas will provide the basis for discussions at the European Feminist Forum event in Poland, 13-15 June, 2008.

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The European Feminist Forum process is first and foremost **participatory**. The agenda and events for next year's conference in Warsaw will be the culmination of the discussions and debates that are now taking place in Affinity Groups all over Europe.

In September 2007, the programming meeting took place to reflect on the results so far of the European Feminist Forum process.

Three key topic areas were identified, and these important issue areas will provide the basis for discussions at the European Feminist Forum event in Poland, 13-15 June, 2008.

## **Topic 1 Economic change in Europe: changes in the economy, the labour market, migration and feminist alternatives**

In Europe, we see a continuing restructuring of labour markets, so they come in line with a globalised and restructured production system, which needs cheap labour (just in time). Workers and the labour market are re-modeled to fit the necessity for flexible labour.

Unless we grasp the nature and direction of these international economic developments, we will not understand what is happening in our various European countries on a day-to-day basis.

Neither will we be able to position the decisions made in international bodies, like the European Union, that determine the space for any feminist alternatives that we may have in mind.

In the different countries in Europe, we have very different set ups of labour market legislation and policies, welfare arrangements and state regulations. Therefore, the labour market, women's work and economic security look slightly different, depending on where we live and how we are positioned.

For many women, economic security came from different sources, often at the same time. From wages, from partner/husband's wages, and state allowances. However, in line with the restructuring of labour markets on an international and national scale, we are facing the downsizing of the welfare state in Europe. Despite housing some of the richest people in the world, there seems to be a constant lack of money for public services and especially for the system of labour rights (unemployment and sickness benefits, state pensions etc), that have

been built up in some countries over centuries. We see private wealth and public poverty, the undermining of public economic control and accountability, and the growing exclusion of many people in Europe.

Migration to and in Europe will be growing in the coming years. Countries have different realities in migration, and the expansion of the European Union has a defining impact on migration as well. The reality of migration and migrants is very different in Eastern, Central and Western Europe. Labour migration has increased substantially, within countries and between countries in Europe. The feminisation of migration is growing.

The feminist movement has a wealth of diverse and localised knowledge and strategies, addressing migration and the feminisation of migration. Within the context of the European Feminist Forum, various groups of migrant women are working towards a Migrant feminist agenda. Other groups are making links between economic changes, migration, eroding civil rights and the War on Terror. What is a feminist perspective on changes in the labour market, migration and Fortress Europe?

Based on discussions so far, the following themes have been identified as potential areas to address:

- ▶ Building alliances between different groups of women in Europe, resisting the dominant economic discourse, and building sustainable feminist alternatives
- ▶ Developing strategies for addressing changes in the labour market, the increasingly precarious position of people who work, and the increase in poverty
- ▶ Challenging corporate power in Europe
- ▶ Discussing domestic work and the “global care chain”
- ▶ Developing a feminist perspective on migration, which includes building a view that takes perspectives from East, West, and South into account
- ▶ Discussing “Fortress Europe”: militarisation, ‘security’ and the erosion of civil rights in the name of stopping migration
- ▶ Discussing the strategies of that feminists/feminist migrant women have articulated so far: towards a migrant feminist agenda
- ▶ Developing economically and ecologically sustainable feminist alternatives

## **Topic 2 Women’s physical and sexual integrity: women’s bodies, abortion and the politics of ending violence against women**

Women’s bodies have been central in feminists struggles, especially work around sexual and reproductive rights around Europe. In addition, feminists have been pointing out how women’s bodies are markers in different political struggles and they have emphasized the need for acknowledging women’s agency, diversity and contradictions, as well as women’s own self-defining of body/bodies and sexualities. In that sense, there is a convergence with LGBTTIQ issues.

Feminists are looking for new angles on violence against women and sexual and reproductive health and rights, acknowledging changing and differing contexts across Europe. We see a patchwork of states that have legal and safe abortion and states that penalise abortion. In Europe, sex is everywhere in public space: representation of sex and women’s bodies has shrunk to the bimbo in popular culture. Diverse groups of women face old and new forms of

violence. Groups of religious fundamentalists (Catholics and Islamists) challenge women's rights, and focus on women's bodies and sexualities.

Based on discussions so far, the following themes have been identified as potential areas to address:

- ▶ Deciding where and how to engage politically in order to expand/challenge the dominant discourse on 'deviant sexualities'; to ensure enforcement of, and respect for, the rights for sexual minorities; and, to claim space for the expression of positive, powerful (female) sexual pleasure
- ▶ Encouraging strategic debate on how women's bodies are portrayed and represented in popular culture (including the views of young women)
- ▶ Pinpointing issues that feminists with secular strategies and feminists inside religious organisations can work on together
- ▶ Defining our strategies related to reproductive rights, including self-determination, family planning and abortion

### **Topic 3 Our movement: feminist resource mobilisation and building political power**

Women's organisations and the women's movement in Europe are struggling with a serious lack of resources. Women's organisations in Western Europe faced cut-backs as early as the 1980s. Since the expansion of the European Union, women's organisations in CEE/CIS are facing a similar development. Recent research has already indicated that European Union funds (public money) are hardly accessible to women's organisations.

Lack of access to public money reveals an underlying lack of political power. Regarding the political representation of women and the safeguarding of women's interests from a feminist perspective, we see different debates inside the feminist movement, especially between East and West.

Based on discussions so far, the following questions have been identified as potential topics for consideration:

- ▶ What are the key strategies for mobilising more resources for the women's movement and for overcoming the donor divide in the North, South and East? Are there new possibilities in collective organising and networking that will lead to improved results?
- ▶ What are the long-term financial strategies for survival for the feminist movement?
- ▶ What are the most effective strategies for gaining political power?
- ▶ What are likely to be the most successful strategies for working with, and bringing pressure to bear, on the European Union, with an emphasis on feminist resource mobilisation?