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## Women for civil society or civil society for women? The Polish story

### Abstract

This paper presents evidence for the argument that in spite of the fact that after the toppling of communism women's rights-related issues were to a large extent imported and supported by external private and public donors, over time Polish civil society has developed its own capacity to represent women and advocate for their rights. At the same time, the institutionalised civil society sector still reproduces some of the structural limitations women face in the public and private sphere alike. Recent examples of mass mobilization protesting the attempts to further limit the already restrictive law on abortions in the country are however indicative of the continuous potential of self-organisation as a source and tool for exercising civil society oversight over the governance processes.

**Keywords:** women empowerment, civil society, Poland

### Introductory remarks

This paper makes a succinct overview of the role of women and women's rights in the development of Polish civil society. At the onset it is important to recognise that women empowerment is not inherent in *all* conceptualisations of civil society. Civil society is a terrain of conservative ideologies that foster women's dependency in the private sphere but also of emancipatory beliefs that enhance gender equality. Civil society as such has been the playground for feminists and other progressive groups as well as for conservative women activists, anti-gay lobbies and even misogynistic male groups (Howell 2005). Hence, the extent to which civil society exhibits respect for women's rights is a litmus for the values espoused by *liberal* theories of civil society *only*. Furthermore, in the context of the countries that embarked on the three-dimensional transformation towards democracy, market economy and civil society, it could not have been expected that with the liberalisation of the public sphere, the empowerment of women would be triggered by default.

These reservations notwithstanding, civil society remains the arena that could create propitious environment for women empowerment in the public and private sphere alike. Women's emancipation is related to civil society in two ways (Borowska 2012). It refers to the number of men and women engaged in the civil

society sector itself, but also to NGOs<sup>1</sup> beneficiaries. Hence, civil society should be studied and held accountable for equally engaging women and men while promoting gender equality in the society at large. In fact, the well-known researcher on self-organisation Robert Putnam noted, women's role in the history of civic engagement as such has been a pivotal one. He explained the empirically observed decline of civic engagement in the United States by *inter alia* the increased women employment and the changes in the traditional family structure (Putnam 2000). Hence, women's withdrawal from grassroots organising had a negative impact on civic engagement in the oldest among modern democracies.

Yet, that women are an element to be reckoned with in the public sphere is a concept still in the making worldwide. Admittedly, women have played a seminal role in civic life. The question remains whether civil society has been the arena that has lived up to its promise to emancipate women (Schwabland et al. 2016). To see whether Polish civil society has been successful in empowering women, is what would be analysed in the following overview of selected aspects of the engagement of civil society in promoting gender equality.

### **Women-related issues and self-organisation in Poland: continuity and change**

After 1989 the purported intention to (re)introduce women's rights' issues to the society's agenda was actually not a new one in Poland. There were women organisations functioning during communist times, too. Yet, like all other quasi-civic entities allowed to exist during the previous regime, those representing women's interests were controlled by the one-party state. For example the established in 1945 *Women's League (Liga Kobiet)* was one of the first organisations to be formally registered after the second world war. It was not a grassroots entity, though. It was founded by the state with the idea to monopolise the field of organisations representing women while legitimising the authorities' intervention in what would otherwise represent the civil society sphere (Lubik-Reczek and Reczek 2013). The *Women's League* claimed to continue the work of the established in 1913 *Polish Women's League*. As such, with its seemingly broad and inclusive programme the *Women's League* managed to attract and co-opt other reactivated pre-war civic organisations representing women's rights, only to start imposing ideological constraints on its members (Ibid., p. 106–107). Nonetheless, this “umbrella” organisation did intervene in matters related to the everyday lives of women in Poland, while promoting women's role as “good citizens enhancing the building of socialism and leading “harmonious” private life” (Ibid., p. 116). After the ousting of the previous regime, the *Women's League* resumed its apolitical activity and work “on behalf of women and families”<sup>2</sup>.

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1 It is not assumed that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) exclusively represent civil society. However, as the institutionalised pillar of civil society is a sizeable and relatively long-lasting emanation of civic activism, involvement in NGOs merits a special attention when studying civil society.

2 [http://ligakobietpolskich.pl/?page\\_id=146](http://ligakobietpolskich.pl/?page_id=146)

The *Rural Women's Organizations – RWO (Koła Gospodyń Wiejskich)* is another example of a grassroots organisation dating back to the 19 century. During the communist times *RWOs* were regarded as either a part of the *Women's League* or as an emanation of farmers' associations (Walczevska 2006 in Ostaszewska 2015, p. 116). The *RWOs* are still thriving in Poland. However, whereas they do represent an example of indigenous self-organising, their activity cannot be regarded as emancipatory or empowering in the political sense as they have notoriously avoided taking sides, for example about abortion-related issues. *RWOs* have been "politically harmless" and still focus predominantly on issues associated with traditional female roles (Matysiak 2017, p. 231, p. 251). Interestingly, although *RWOs* formally are still a part of the structure of the male farmers' organisations, the former largely survived the transformation period, whereas many of the latter are no longer functioning (Grzebisz-Nowicka 1995 in Ibid., p. 240). The reported lack of focus on women empowerment notwithstanding, *RWOs* keep being important especially in rural areas as they provide space for female collective actions as well as tools of social activation for elderly women. At present, the number of *RWOs* that are still part of its institutional network is around 2,500 (Matysiak 2017, p. 241).

That many women were part of the *RWOs'* network which eschewed political involvement shouldn't imply that women were not interested in politics. On the contrary, as accounts of women's engagement in the symbol of civic activism in Poland – the *Solidarity* trade union and movement – certify, women have been as involved in *Solidarity* as men were. Yet, at the First *Solidarity* Congress in 1981 women represented just 7% of delegates (Dzido 2016, p. 88). Women keep being remembered, if at all, as those who supported their interned husbands or those who just aided the most important individuals associated with the *Solidarity* movement. That women themselves were agents of change in their own right was an overlooked historical fact until recently. With the toppling of the previous regime, one could expect that these changes represented opportunities for (further) empowering women and giving them a voice and agency in the public and private spheres alike. Almost thirty years after the ousting of communism, it has become clear though, that the transformation period empowered citizens and decision-makers espousing antipodean views. This development impacted the rights of women and eventually reinforced the gender division within Polish society. After 1989 many women lost jobs in the most feminised segments of the labour market. What is more, some previously owned by the state tasks and responsibilities in care, health, and education have been quietly transferred to the private sphere. These have become "family problems", or, to put it bluntly, women's problems (Kowalska et al. 2014). Indeed, after 1989 many educated women and women from privileged background did take advantage of the transformation. It was also due to those educated, active women citizens that many of the post-1989 women NGOs were established.

## The transformation period post-1989 and the role of external support for women NGOs in Poland

The liberalisation of the public sphere allowed for new women NGOs to be established. Some of these thirty-something entities founded in the first four years after 1989 were supported or even established by foreign women's federations, like *Soroptimists* (*Soroptymistki*), the *Polish Federation of Business and Professional Women Clubs* (*Federacja Kobiet Aktywnych Zawodowo*), while others reactivated their pre-WWI activity, like the *Council of Polish women* (*Rada Polek*). One researcher noted that the very opening of Poland to the world made Polish women aware of their "slavish role" and the need to achieve greater agency in the public sphere (Sawa-Czajka 1994, p. 199). Charity women NGOs were likewise established during the first years of the transformation (Ibid., p. 202). As far as numbers of registered NGOs are concerned, according to the most current data base of Polish Non-Governmental Organisations, there are 4545 NGOs in Poland which address women's issues<sup>3</sup>.

Indeed, both liberal and conservative women established or joined civil society organisations at the onset of the transition. The promotion of women's rights in Poland was redefined and accelerated by the impact of external factors. The international women's movement has played a leading role in spreading world-cultural ideas about women all over the globe (Berkovitch 1999). Women international NGOs have successfully lobbied intergovernmental organisations and national policy-makers alike thus bringing about the tremendous expansion of activities and ideas regarding women's issues on international and domestic level. The impact of external funders on promoting women's rights in Poland hasn't been unequivocal, though. The analysis of external support for women NGOs in Poland and Hungary suggested that instead of trying to get a grip of the role of civic initiatives in post-communist countries, Western foundations invested in newly created organisations modelled on the West (McMahon 2002, p. 47).

In addition to imposing organisational isomorphism, external funders also introduced technical demands to make sure women are represented. Yet, the contention that external donors supported only liberal NGOs or individuals (Wedel 2001, p. 99) was not substantiated. As a representative of a liberal think-tank engaged in civil society since the beginning of the transition reminisced, "*the strongest interference [on behalf of US donors] I remember was when the Ford Foundation asked us to fill in a table how many men and women worked in the project, which in those boorish times we considered as a horrible imposition of some rotten, feminist ideas.*"<sup>4</sup>. Hence, although there was indigenously identified demand to empower women, the provided by external donors supply of tools and language to enhance women emancipation was not necessarily well understood by the intended beneficiaries at the onset of the transition. Yet this external support eventually contributed to

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3 <http://bazy.ngo.pl/kobiety>, accessed 27.06.2018

4 Quotation from an interview conducted as part of a research of representatives of Polish NGOs carried out between May 2014 and February 2015. See Chimiak 2016 for more details.

the legitimisation of new norms, principles and customs, thus redefining the understanding of what constitutes public interest and changing social practices.

Western foundations were argued to have been more prone to fund new feminist NGOs, irrespective of the fact that existing professional organisations or women's sections enjoyed better institutional and societal embeddedness. However, the most disturbing unintended consequence of external support for women NGOs has been the ensuing infighting among these NGOs competing for funds (McMahon 2002, p. 48). Still, as Andrada Nimu contended in her comparative analysis of women and LGBT NGOs in Poland and Romania, through strategies of decoupling those NGOs have been successful in challenging the foreign funders' agenda, procedures and techniques (Nimu 2015).

The absence of domestic financial or moral support in the first years of the transition reportedly exacerbated women NGOs' dependence on international assistance. In spite of the relative isolation of women NGOs from the general public and policy-making alike, Polish women NGOs' international cooperation and their impact on national decision-makers were more pronounced than the above-quoted studies could suggest. For example, a number of women organisations united in the *Polish Committee of NGOs* prepared a shadow report to be presented at the 1995 United Nations Beijing Conference on Women (Polish Committee of NGOs 1995). Hence Polish women NGOs employed the "boomerang effect" strategy, whereby domestic civic initiatives actively look for allies abroad with the intention to exercise pressure on national policy elites (Keck and Sikkink 1998). At the same time it should be acknowledged that the established by members of the intelligentsia and also sometimes supported by external donors feminist organisations were not successful in reaching out to women from rural areas and to women favoring traditional views. An alternative explanation of the thriving of women NGOs espousing conservative values should be their indifference to the emancipatory rhetoric of indigenous and exogenous feminist NGOs.

It was largely assistance from international donors that inspired Polish women NGOs to focus on issues previously considered taboo in Polish society, such as violence against women or child abuse. Eventually, those issues gained public attention in Poland and became mainstream in 2015<sup>5</sup>. The women NGO sector in Poland has traditionally been a provider of services targeting women victims of domestic violence. For many years civil society has actually been filling a legal gap in this area. As Urszula Nowakowska of the *Center for Women's Rights* explained, the available legal instrument focused on prevention of violence in the family; hence the state support targeted the family and not the victim, who in most cases was a woman

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5 The *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) was signed in December 2012 in Poland. Its ratification took place in April 2015 amid harsh, on-going criticism from rightist circles in Polish society. The then president Bronisław Komorowski signed the convention at the headquarters of the *Centre for Women's Rights Foundation* and thanked women NGOs for their advocacy and social support for women victims of domestic violence [online:] <http://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-bronislawa-komorowskiego/aktualnosci/wydarzenia/art,3219,trzeba-pryncypialnie-stac-po-stronie-ofiar.html>, accessed 18 July 2018.

(Nowakowska 2013). NGOs offering various types of support to women victims of domestic violence have however been challenged in obtaining public funding over the last two years (*Wystąpienie RPO* 2016).

### Civil society providing support to women

Civil society in Poland was co-established by women and women have also been beneficiaries of NGOs' activities. For example, it was mostly women who benefited from the primary legal assistance and citizens advice services offered by *inter alia* NGOs. This study provided evidence that (in spite of women's higher – than male beneficiaries' – level of education and the fact that women also work for remuneration in addition to the unpaid services they render to their families) the average primary legal assistance and citizens advice beneficiary was a woman aged 25–50 who experienced life difficulties or lack of financial resources (Peisert et al. 2013, p. 80). Women's interest in unpaid citizens advice has been a result of their better – than men's – functional literacy (Białecki 1998) skills as well as of their sole responsibility for family matters (Chimiak 2013, p. 144). In the beginning of the transition, Polish NGOs offering unpaid primary legal assistance and citizens advice were likewise supported financially by external funders (Dudkiewicz et al. 2013, p. 27).

Women NGOs should also be credited for advocating for women's rights. Many such entities were established in 1989-1992 to protest against the (then) planned penalisation of abortion, like the *Association „Women's Dignity”* (*Stowarzyszenie „Godność Kobiety”*), the association *Pro-Femina*, the *Movement for Women's Self-defense* (*Ruch Samoobrony Kobiet*), the *Movement on behalf of defense of women's rights* (*Ruch na rzecz Obrony Praw Kobiet*), the *Polish Feminist Association* (*Polskie Stowarzyszenie Feministyczne*), the *Szczecin Feminist Collective* (*Szczeciński Kolektyw Feministyczny*), or the *Federation for Women and Family Planning* (*Federacja na rzecz kobiet i planowania rodziny*). Yet, it was the Catholic Church and Catholic pro-life communities who successfully lobbied during the process of drafting and adopting the said law. As a result, since 1993 the legislation on abortion in Poland has been among the strictest in Europe. The consequent symbolic victory of the Catholic Church can also be observed in the shift in the discourse as well as in legal acts, where “foetus” has been replaced by “unborn child” in the former and by “conceived child” in the latter case (Szelewa 2016).

Conservative-minded Polish women NGOs entertain their own view about the role of women in society and about the right to terminate pregnancy on demand. Thus the *Polish Society of Catholic Women* (*Polski Związek Kobiet Katolickich*), initially established as the *Polish Society of Ordinary Women* (*Polski Związek Zwyczajnych Kobiet*) has consistently advocated for the rights of the family (and not the rights of the individual) as paramount. The *Polish Society of Catholic Women* supported the penalisation of abortion and considered “gender” a “dangerous ideology”<sup>6</sup>. This

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<sup>6</sup> See *Kobiety katolickie wdzięczne biskupom za list nt. gender* [online:] <http://www.idziemy.pl/spoleczenstwo/kobiety-katolickie-wdzieczne-biskupom-za-list-nt-gender/2/>



organization has been active mostly in small towns and catholic communities (Sawa-Czajka 1994, p. 201). Some women's immunity to the emancipatory rhetoric could have been fed by the antipodean, conservative narrative which favors the embedding of women in the private sphere. To quote from the then leader of the *Women's League* Katarzyna Jurkowska, "Poland after 1989 has become a state much more ideological and this ideology is directed against the freedom and rights of women" (Jurkowska 2000, p. 38). Indeed, despite the relatively quick pace of development of civil society in democratic Poland, the concomitant "romanticized reversal of *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*" (Einhorn 1993, p. 8) has been taking place (Chimiak 2003). This backward development refers to the attempt to relocate women to the domestic sphere.

Women however cannot be contained in the private sphere with impunity. Since 2000 the *Manifa* demonstration has been taking place annually on International Women's Day, the 8<sup>th</sup> of March. In Poland, the grassroots movement of mothers emerged in 2002 when single mothers protested against the shutdown of the Alimony Fund (Hryciuk 2017, p. 153). Despite the movement's widespread support, it was only partially successful. It should be admitted here that as far as politicians are concerned, back then the initiative of single mothers to reinstate the Alimony Fund was supported only by the conservative *Law and Justice* party. There have also been other, albeit modest, successes of women-initiated movements in Poland. By studying Alicja Tysi c's case for reproductive rights and the discount shop *Biedronka's* case for employment rights, it was proved that legal mobilisation and supportive media discourse could directly influence legal practices while exerting a socialising effect on the population (Fuchs 2013). Thus, when addressing both the state and the society at large, such legal strategies of the women's movement can succeed in contributing to democratic consolidation (Ibid.).

The most spectacular example have however been mass protests opposing attempts to totally ban abortion. On October 3, 2016 over 100 thousand women from more than 146 towns and cities in Poland went to the streets to protest the draft law to ban abortion during what came to be known as the Black Monday. Just as in 1992 the (then) planned total penalisation of the termination of pregnancy polarised women NGOs (Sawa-Czajka 1994, p. 202), the black protests in 2016 and 2017 mobilised, yet at the same time helped identify the enduring breach in the society regarding women's role and women's rights (Chmielewska et al. 2017). Indeed, women's activism proves to be embedded in and shaped by social context (Schwabenland et al. 2016). Remarkably, although the protests themselves were not a reflection of a sudden increase of more permissive attitudes towards the right to terminate a pregnancy, they reportedly not only triggered opposition to the proposed bills, but also helped enhance social support for the liberalisation of existing regulations (Korolczuk 2016, p.94). Nonetheless, the issue of women's rights

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7 *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* are coined by Ferdinand T nnies terms signifying the ideal types of social organizations. In his influential work *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* T nnies (1887; *Community and Society*) differentiated between the *Gemeinschaft* (communal society) and the *Gesellschaft* (associational society).

divides public opinion as well as those who are supposed to support development abroad and export the Polish recipe for successful transformation.

### Women's rights: still a contested ground

Indeed, almost 30 years after the ousting of the previous regime, women's rights keep being regarded in a selective manner – or being outright opposed – by segments of the civil society sector itself. As the case of *Grupa Zagranica* (the platform of Polish NGOs engaged in development cooperation abroad) indicates, the bone of contention among its member organisations has been the issue of gender equality and equity. A few years ago *Grupa Zagranica* unsuccessfully attempted to adopt a shared code of conduct, i.e. the Istanbul Principles agreed at the *Open Forum for Civil Society Organisations Development Effectiveness' Global Assembly* in Istanbul in 2010<sup>8</sup>. The reason for this failure was that some of the organisations associated with the Catholic Church “viewed the issue as a threat”<sup>9</sup>. Another aid professional opined, “If we are not capable of speaking in a sane way about the rights of women in Poland, how can we shape those standards in the world?”<sup>10</sup>. Indeed, although the religious authorities in Poland do not openly speak against the entire human rights canon, “they are selective in their support of human rights principles based on religious doctrine” (Kowalska et al. 2014, p. 4).

Aid professionals are however not blind to the privileged situation they themselves enjoy when working in development, including in the area of women empowerment. As one of them admitted, “there is one aspect no one is willing to talk about. When I go to Africa, being a white woman, quite well educated, there everything comes much easier for me, than it would have been here in Poland or anywhere in the West. You enter this community [in Africa], and by default you have a higher status. This is an outcome of social inequalities. .. For my colleagues [in Africa] I am a woman from Europe, and I am immediately better off [than women who are from Africa]... It is hard to admit this, but [being in Africa] I can achieve more, I have a bigger capacity, there are more opportunities there for me”. This quotation is indicative of the relevance of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989) as a framework for conceptualising a woman's life chances as affected by not only her gender, but also the race, class, religious beliefs or sexual orientation she espouses.

Indeed, some women – just like many men – enjoy privileges when working in the civil society sector. However, as far as motivations are concerned, power motives

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8 The eight principles are: Respect and promote human rights and social justice; Embody gender equality and equity while promoting women and girls' rights; Focus on people's empowerment, democratic ownership and participation; Promote environmental sustainability; Practice transparency and accountability; Pursue equitable partnerships and solidarity; Create and share knowledge and commit to mutual learning; Commit to realising positive sustainable change.

9 Quotation from an interview conducted as part of a research of representatives of Polish NGDOs. See Chimiak 2016 for more details.

10 Ibid.



prove to be alien to women engaged in urban feminist movements and traditional *RWOs* alike. Both liberal-minded and conservative women engaged in informal civic activism are incentivised to work on behalf of their community (Ostaszewska 2015). The need to socialise proved more characteristic of women than of men who joined uninstitutionalised civic initiatives (Polanska 2015, p. 41–42). However, as the opinionating *ngo.pl* portal put it, “Men do the representation and women do the toiling”<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, men seem to be more often concerned with the remunerative aspect of work for an NGO. An advocate for children’s rights pointed out that mostly women work in her organisation: “*this is a problem, when we announce a job offer, no men apply... Ours is a women’s field, because of funds, we don’t make much money in foundations and men think they should earn more*”<sup>12</sup>. It has been observed that women face a number of discriminatory practices in the NGO sector. For example, although NGOs active in the fields of education and health promotion are heavily feminised, the boards of just one-third of these organizations comprise of women only (Borowska 2012). But then, professional segregation of women and men has been growing in Poland since 2006 (Walko-Mazurek 2017).

After all, civil society sector remains a litmus of the culture it represents. At the same time it has the potential to mould the society it comes from. Thus, one could only agree that there is a need for more feminist women’s organisations in Polish rural areas, such that could tackle issues like domestic violence, discrimination of women in the labour market, or the under-representation of women in local politics (Matysiak 2017, p. 251). In fact, recent urban settlers in rural areas (who, it can be presumed, are bearers of more progressive worldviews) also sometimes opt for establishing *RWOs*, even though they were eyed with distrust by “indigenous” farmers’ wives (Milczewska et al. 2014: 32 in *Ibid.*, p. 242). No doubt, further research on the gendered composition of civil society is needed along with continuous analysis of the gendered norms and practices civil societies keep exhibiting.

Yet even international NGOs advocating for women’s rights have limited impact when it comes to empowerment. Although they can be powerful actors in advancing women’s status, international NGOs can at best improve the economic and social rights of women, but not their *political* rights (Murdie and Peksen 2015). At the same time, the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women between 1981 and 2004 strongly enhanced women’s political rights, while reportedly having no effect on women’s economic rights, and in some cases even impinging on women’s social rights (Cole 2012). A conclusion can be made that for the promotion of women’s rights to succeed, non-state actors’ ability to exercise moral authority needs to be synergistically paired with the adoption of relevant legal instruments.

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11 <http://wiadomosci.ngo.pl/wiadomosc/776031.html>

12 Quotation from an interview conducted as part of a research of representatives of Polish NGOs. See Chimiak 2016 for more details.

## Concluding remarks

The argument that women in Poland keep being deterred from participation in public life “because of upbringing, tradition, education, rituals, religion” (Choluj 2001, p. 148) still appears to hold true. Indeed, new developments are taking place. Namely, research has shown that women, and especially the younger generation of women, exhibit both more tolerant and more egalitarian attitudes than their male peers and their parents alike (Bilewicz et al. 2014). At the same time, young men appear to be predominantly socially conservatively minded (Korolczuk 2016, p. 109). This breach however does not appear to bode well for the future. Education and socialisation have usually been considered to be the main culprits of women’s subordinated role in the public and domestic sphere alike. Hence changes need to be introduced at an early age, as early childhood appears to be the formative age in this respect.

According to psychologists Jack and Jeanne Block, females who became liberals as adults had shown distinctive characteristics while in nursery school, especially when compared with little girls who grew up to become conservatives. The former were talkative and dominating, expressed negative feelings openly, strove to be independent, were self-assertive and set high standards for themselves, while the latter had been indecisive, easily victimised by other children, inhibited, shy and reserved, obedient and immobilised by stress. The future liberal versus conservative men showed far fewer differences as children in nursery school than the women did. Future male liberals were more resourceful, independent and proud of their accomplishments, while tomorrow’s conservative males appeared to feel unworthy, expressed a readiness to feel guilty and tended to be distrustful of others (Altemeyer 2006, p. 70). Young girls and boys alike should be encouraged to speak up their mind and be assertive from a very young age, which is obviously a task for parents, public institutions and civil society alike.

Polish civil society will keep being an arena where gender battles will be fought, with conservative and progressive men and women advocating for their worldviews and the respective policies. Recent times have brought new challenges for the women rights’ agenda. Yet, those new hindrances notwithstanding, women empowerment has been under way now for more than a century. After all, exactly a hundred years ago Poland became one of the first countries in Europe to grant women a right to vote. The centenary of this milestone event is as much an occasion for celebration as an opportunity to appreciate the achievements in the area of emancipation and plan the short-term and long-term measures to continue enhancing women empowerment in the civil society and the society at large.

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## Streszczenie

Po obaleniu komunizmu promowanie praw kobiet przez nowopowstające organizacje pozarządowe zostało w znaczny sposób wsparte przez zagranicznych prywatnych oraz publicznych darczyńców. Jednak z czasem polskie społeczeństwo obywatelskie rozwinęło własne zasoby reprezentowania kobiet oraz działania na rzecz ich praw. Niemniej jednak, zinstytucjonalizowany sektor społeczeństwa obywatelskiego reprodukuje niektóre z ograniczeń strukturalnych z którymi borykają się kobiety zarówno w obszarze publicznym, jak i prywatnym. Ostatnie przykłady masowej mobilizacji wokół prób dalszego zaostrzenia prawa do przerywania ciąży świadczą jednak o wciąż żywym potencjale do samoorganizowania się jako źródło egzekwowania nadzoru obywatelskiego nad procesami rządzenia w kraju.

**Słowa kluczowe:** uwłasnowolnienie kobiet, społeczeństwo obywatelskie, Polska.