

Knowledge Transfer and First Steps towards Implementing Mentoring in Bulgaria

Dr. Nikolina Sretenova
Bulgarian ENWISE Expert
Institute for Philosophical Research
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
e-mail: sretenova@hotmail.com



Funded by FP6

Nikolina Sretenova, FP6, BAS, Bulgaria

The start-up of a mentoring programme is strongly dependent on the synergy between specific supportive conditions present on the following structural levels

- The national level - legislation, policy and politics, organization and administrative structures and resources related with gender equality issue (in higher education and research)
- The level of research and academic institutions
- The level of agents (actors)
- The level of potential beneficiaries: mentees and mentors

This paper aims to provide insight into and to highlight the specificity of the factors currently operating at each level in Bulgaria by comparing them with those of the partners' countries – Switzerland, Germany and Austria.



Nikolina Sretenova

The national level (before the political change of 1989)

After the Second World War, when the Soviet Union imposed its rule over Bulgaria and other Eastern European countries a particular Soviet model of equality was adopted in the country.

- The law for complete equality of rights between the sexes in Bulgaria was among the first enacted laws of the Parliament upon the establishment of the new political regime (*Act of Equality of Rights between Sexes*, Decree № 30 of 12 October 1944).
- In the course of nearly half a century of totalitarian rule in Bulgaria (1944 – 1989) the gender equality had a statute of **state policy** (a policy of full employment of women and a policy of equal access to education)
- Within Higher Education sector: **on average only 9 per cent of women were full professors and 22 per cent associate professors** (in 1987)



Nikolina Sretenova

Before and during the communist regime in Bulgaria (1944-1989)

Before the communist regime:

- 1901 - The 'Bulgarian Union of Women'
- 1924 - The 'Bulgarian Association of University Women'

During the communist regime:

- no women networks are allowed to exist (an explanatory clue for the current absence of culture of networking)
- Important difference with the research done in Western countries during this period - lack of any public discourse on the issues like 'glass ceiling', 'pay gap' or 'career building'. As it has been nicely pointed in the Enwise report 'in communist countries, the existing **glass ceiling** was not reflected on, named or criticized by women. Neither was it a theme in social sciences' (p. 26 of the report).



Nikolina Sretenova

The Accession Period (1998-2006) – Fact sheets

- **December 1995:** Bulgaria submitted its application for EU membership and two years later preliminary negotiations were launched.
- **November 1998:** The Commission presented its first regular report on Bulgaria's progress towards accession. The second report, released in 1999, recommended that formal negotiations be opened.
- **February 2000:** Formal negotiations between Bulgaria and the EU started.
- **June 2004:** Formal negotiations between Bulgaria and the EU were finalized.
- **2001- 2004:** Several "Regular Reports on Bulgaria's Progress towards Accession" delivered by the Commission of the European Communities at the end of 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004 assessed the progress that has been done in preparation for membership and recommended some improvements in the field. These official documents have been structured in accordance with the list of 29 *acquis* chapters.



Nikolina Sretenova

Formal negotiations with the EC for EU membership: Chapter 13 of the Union *acquis* 'Social policy and employment' (equal treatment for men and women)

- 2003: *Law on Protection against Discrimination* (adopted on 30 September 2003)
- 2004: At the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy was established a sector/unit for "Equal Opportunities for Women and Men" with a view to coordinating and implementing the state policy in this area
- 2005: At the Bulgarian Council of Ministers was established 'A National Council for Equal Opportunities'

In Bulgaria a **general policy of non-discrimination by sex in all fields of social activities is existing, but a particular policy for 'gender equality (in higher education and research)' is still lacking**



Nikolina Sretenova

A Comparison with partners' countries: Switzerland, Germany and Austria

- At the level of federal and/or national governments of Switzerland, Germany and Austria a national policy for gender equality in higher education has been adopted and further developed in the respective ministries of education and science. The operationalization of this policy results in establishment of departments/units in charge of implementation of the state policy for gender equality in higher education through opening of specific target programmes and funding-lines for support of activities in this area.
- In particular in Germany, Austria and Switzerland specific laws have been enacted which provided an instrument for implementation of gender equality in higher education and enabled the creation of federal programmes of equal opportunities in accordance with the adopted national gender equality policy in higher education.
- Unlike partners' countries in Bulgaria the ministry of education and science has not developed a similar national policy for gender equality in higher education because it has to address other priorities of its agenda setting. The consequences are that the ministry lacks organizational and administrative structure engaged with the coordination of activities in the field of gender equality in higher education as well as a specific budget for support of such activities.



Nikolina Strelanova

The level of research and academic institutions

To date all normative documents which regulate the Bulgarian HE and GOV R&D sectors as well as the deriving from them regulations have set texts in their provisions on prohibition of all kind of discrimination – be it by sex, ethnicity, religion, etc. These include the Higher Education Act, Law for the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Law on Scientific Titles and Degrees, Law for Scientific Research Promotion, Regulation of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Regulations for Sofia University's organization and activity. However, even in the regulations - not even speaking about the normative documents - there are not any texts related to the issues of gender equality in higher education and research, watch on gender balance, etc.

As a result there is no office/officer in charge of responsibility for implementation of equal opportunity policy at the level of Bulgarian universities and research institutes.

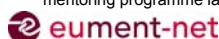


Nikolina Strelanova

A Comparison with partners' countries: Switzerland, Germany and Austria

- Switzerland:** the adopted national policy for 'gender equality in higher education' on federal and/or national level has been implemented in establishing a particular organizational and administrative structure – 'Offices for gender equality' across Swiss French universities and Swiss German universities;
- Germany:** a particular regional structure – 'Baden-Wurtemberg's state conference of equal opportunities officers (LaKoG);
- Austria:** the 'Project Centre for the Advancement of Women' which was later re-named into 'Centre for Gender Equality' was institutionally set at the Rectorate of the Vienna University.

Similar structures which might facilitate the potential start-up of an academic mentoring programme lack in Bulgaria.



Nikolina Strelanova

The level of agents (actors)

- The low wages of Bulgarian academics and researchers during the last 18 years have given rise to a new phenomenon of double employment, or even of triple employment of the high positioned personnel (both men and women associate and full professors) of the HE and GOV R&D sectors. Under this severe condition it seems hardly possible to convince these persons to invest additional time in the mentoring enterprise.
- In Bulgaria as well as in the other 'new' EU members-states there is a large pool of women academics and researchers at the level of the PhD studies as well as experienced women scientists which might facilitate the implementation of mentoring programmes here. However the model for scientific career building in Bulgaria is a 'male career model'. Those women scientists who have succeeded to obtain top positions according to the 'male model' do not understand why they should be gender sensitive and why they should support junior women scientists.



Nikolina Strelanova

A Comparison with partners' countries: Switzerland, Germany and Austria (She Figures 2006; data for 2004)

Country	Grade A (Full Professors)	Grade B (Associate Professors)
Bulgaria	18.0	34.9
Switzerland	16.5	23.3
Germany	9.2	16.1
Austria	9.5	16.2
EU – 25 average	15.3	32.2

Nikolina Strelanova

The level of potential beneficiaries (mentees and mentors)

The crucial factor of importance at this level is the local receptivity towards the planned knowledge transfer on academic mentoring, which is neither self-evident nor self-understanding. In order to make an informed decision about a start-up of academic mentoring schemes in Bulgaria we need more insight into the specific local deficiencies and gaps faced by early career women scientists as well as a feedback on beneficiaries' receptivity of the instrument of mentoring. With regard to this the Bulgarian team carried out an empirical study. It focused on two target groups by using two sociological methods: focus group interviews session complemented with a questionnaire survey.



Nikolina Strelanova

Empirical Study with two target groups using two sociological methods: focus group interviews session complemented with questionnaire survey

- The target group of Bulgarian women PhD students in 'soft' and 'hard' sciences coming from different research institutes and Universities – the focus group interviews session with the follow-up completion of a questionnaire took place on 9th May 2007;
- The target group of Bulgarian early career women academics and researchers employed in the Bulgarian GOV R&D sector and in HE sector - the focus group interviews session with the follow-up completion of a questionnaire took place on 30th May 2007;

The Questionnaire survey: several open questions-cases. Some of the issues addressed concern

1. relevant factors for the medium term career development, as estimated by the participants
2. gender issues related to
 - a) the work-life-balance
 - b) dual career issues, related to international mobility, and
 - c) women's position in male-dominated environments
3. the image of "successful woman" in the participants field and the availability of role models
4. participation and inclusion in networks for women in academy and research

What do early career women academics and researchers expect from the implementation of academic mentoring programmes in Bulgaria? What kind of support do they imagine to receive from their mentor?

- To help me to get involved in international projects; to consult me about some practical requirements related with project's preparation; to facilitate my access to international contacts
 - Professional lobbying - to convince his/her professional contacts abroad in the values of my scientific work; to serve as PR for my scientific production abroad
 - To advise me which is the best place for my planned post doc abroad and for my career planning (e.g. 2 months stay at this institution, 6 months - at the other, because...); to negotiate the conditions of my forthcoming specialization/post doc abroad
 - To provide information about recent novelties and innovations in my field
- Main concern and skepticism expressed: perception of trust and confidence. The mentor is supposed to be a friend as well and to really care about me. The skepticism comes from the fact that friendship could not be administrated – one establishes it by intuition.

Tentative conclusions drawn by comparison

- A comparison between the Bulgarian and partners' cases at the three constituent levels (national, the level of academic and research institutions and the level of supporting agents) suggests that the partners' models of starting-up mentoring programmes currently cannot be transferred to Bulgaria.
- While partners make efforts to re-define the current policy and politics of 'gender equality in higher education' as practised in their universities to a policy and politics of gender equality and gender balance of academic staff at the higher hierarchical levels of academic organizations and at leadership and decision-making positions Bulgaria needs to advocate for the transfer of current policy and politics of 'non-discrimination by sex' into a policy and politics of 'gender equality in academia and research'.

A four-step strategy for implementation of academic mentoring programmes in Bulgaria

Given the lack of supportive conditions at each of these three levels how then an academic mentoring scheme could start-up in Bulgaria at all? According to our study, the outlined specific hindering factors of the Bulgarian case might be overcome through a **step-by-step approach**.

- First step: **Networking**
- Second step: **Fund raising**
- Third step: **Short-term perspective (1-2 years)**
- Forth step: **Medium-term perspective (3-5 years)**

Thank you for your attention!

