

HEINRICH BÖLL FOUNDATION

Inaugural event Gunda Werner Institute
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Inaugural address by Barbara Unmüßig, President, Heinrich Böll Foundation

Dear Friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be able to welcome you all today to our inaugural event and hopefully also this evening to the celebrations to mark the opening of the Gunda Werner Institute for Feminism and Gender Democracy. It is wonderful that so many comrades-in-arms from the inner and outer circles of the Heinrich Böll Foundation have found their way to us and want to accompany us on our path to new horizons. Our objective today with the opening of the Gunda Werner Institute for Feminism and Gender Democracy (GWI) is to usher in a new gender political stage at the Heinrich Böll Foundation.

Looking back, looking forward

Before I outline our motives for founding the Gunda Werner Institute, I will allow myself to take a short look back. This look back at history shows that the shared task of gender democracy has many “mothers” and some “fathers”. The term “gender democracy” was introduced from the USA to Germany by the Berlin sociologist Halina Bendkowski in the 1990’s. The term and the concept fitted well into the discussions going on within the various reform working groups of the newly emerging foundation. The search was on for a new profile which, on the one hand, reflected the long-existing uneasiness with the women’s politics of the 1970’s, however on the other guaranteed that the feminist and women’s politics roots of the movement would not be removed. There were fierce arguments, in particular also with female supporters of the Green movement, some of whom strongly rejected the concept of gender democracy. As a result the women involved in the Reform-AG developed the idea of introducing a shared task of gender democracy as the new foundation’s political objective and organisational mission statement. This was virgin territory – as was the subsequent founding of the Feminist Institute.

Now, almost ten years to the day after the merger of the three individual foundations, the Foundation can look back on a proud record. Today we can, with good reason, assert that gender politics – in tandem with ecology and democracy politics – is one of the key distinctive characteristics of the Heinrich Böll Foundation in its national and international work as well as in its scholarship programme. In matters of organisational and HR development the Foundation has become a pioneer and role model for many other organisations.

This is thanks to the hard work of many people who have developed and implemented concepts and profiles, both as full-time employees and as unsalaried volunteers and, most definitely, thanks to the commitment and developmental work of Gunda Werner – which I shall come back to later. The precondition for feminism and gender democracy becoming a permanent fixture at the Heinrich Böll Foundation was that the organisational preconditions for both were also created during the fusion process of the three separate predecessor foundation:

The “Joint Taskforce for Gender Democracy” was established, with the objective of providing strong gender democratic impulses within the organisation and in public life.

And the “Feminist Institute” was founded. The aim of both was to guarantee that feminist and gender democratic analyses and perspectives flow into the political work of the Heinrich Böll Foundation. Ultimately, the new developed role model of gender democracy and also the Feminist Institute were anchored in the Foundation’s Charter.

“...we are proud of [the shared task of gender democracy in the Heinrich Böll Foundation] because the likelihood of these structures existing in any other mixed organisation is slim. But for us, there is no reason to allow the further process of the Foundation’s development to be left to its own devices.”

This quotation dates from 1999 and is by Gunda Werner – the source of the new institute’s name.

For us, this statement was the motto for a thorough examination of the strategies and political focuses of feminist and gender politics. We also debated whether our institutional arrangements, that is, working in two separate units, still made sense. Furthermore, we also took into account the Foundation’s entire work abroad and, among other things, we organised a strategy workshop lasting several days in Lahore, Pakistan for all our foreign offices.

The key motivation for these cogitations and taking stock was, and is, how we can further strengthen our gender political influence whilst simultaneously improving the intermeshing of gender democratic and feminist analyses and perspectives over past experience.

Despite all the successes of recent years a joint analysis showed that the FI and the Joint Taskforce all too often have worked parallel to each other inside of together. The potential of feminist or, in particular, gender democratic analyses, our work in men’s politics have received far too little consideration in the political processing of topics. There were too few political synergies; many competences and much gender political knowledge were not employed to the optimum extent.

For many years the Foundation has avoided a more in-depth debate on the issue of how feminism and gender democracy actually relate to each other. Where are the differences between the two approaches? What actually differentiates them in their corresponding political spheres of influence? Do they have a productive relationship with each other or actually not?

In addition to these fundamental conceptual questions and thoughts, there was a high degree of consensus that re-structuring

- should take up the successes and experiences and the feminist and gender democratic profiles of the old units. We need avenues of thought and debate – also separate ones such as the Ladies’ Lunch or the Men’s Forum – now and in the future. They are thus part of the established repertoire of our gender political and feminist offering.
- should retain gender democracy as its role model. A role model whose objective is to overcome power and dominance relationships between the sexes. Not only the calling into question of stereotypical gender roles in the political and private arenas but also their transformation in the emancipatory and democratic sense have lost none of their political influence today.
- That gender democracy should continue to be a shared task for all divisions of the Foundation.
- It was also clear that the new Gunda Werner Institute should have the same personnel and financial resources at its disposal as both the previous units, the Joint Taskforce and the FI and that the GWI, as previously the FI, should be anchored in the Charter.

Nevertheless, in addition to courage and zest for new things, the overall process triggered anxieties and scepticism – both among colleagues in the two units and also in the unsalaried Women's Council and our political environment.

That we are able to celebrate today, following many, many months of discussion, is due to the fact that in the final analysis everyone participated in the process in an extremely constructive manner. I would like to express my gratitude for this to Gitti Hentschel, to Henning von Barga, to Ulrike Allroggen and to Karin Fröhlich. The unsalaried Women's Council was a wonderfully reflective, constructive support. Many thanks for this.

At the last Members' Assembly of the Heinrich Böll Foundation we anchored the GWI in the Foundation's Charter; the personnel and financial resources have been secured; we are working on a comprehensive gender political position paper for the entire Foundation; we are honing the new Institute's thematic profile (more on this later) and we will, in the near future, have a new, joint Internet presence which will improve and strengthen our PR work.

We will never ever give up on feminism or on the objective of the shared task of gender democracy, as so many doubting women and some doubting men have asked. I am utterly convinced that the new "Gunda Werner Institute for Feminism and Gender Democracy" (GWI) will be the proof of the productive partnership of feminist, gender democratic and men's politics approaches in the political handling of gender relationships and hierarchies, both internally and externally. Because our concern is not with an "Either or", but rather with **complementary** strategies. A joint institute will allow us to better bundle our strengths, facilitate political synergies, but also create occasional frictions among us and others; expand our horizons and thus, hopefully, represent overall a new quality in gender politics.

Gunda Werner – the source of the Institute's name

Gunda Werner – so I was assured by her partner Annette Hecker – would have been pleased by this new phase and viewed it as a logical step. Because her primary concern was just this – to break new ground within in the area between feminist analyses and strategies and the developing field of gender democratic approaches.

Gunda Werner was, in equal measure, the Executive Director of the FrauenAnstiftung Foundation, a philosopher and an organisation developer. This was the reason why she was so enthusiastic about the idea of a *shared task of gender democracy* in the new Foundation. She had a formative influence on the concept's development and the first steps towards its implementation.

Gunda Werner represents the continuously challenging search for new institutional and organisational forms – a characteristic now also reflected in the merger of the Feminist Institute and the Joint Taskforce for Gender Democracy.

Many people ask "Who was Gunda Werner?" We have honoured her commitment posthumously and are happy to have named the new institute after Gunda Werner. A lesbian intellectual to date virtually unknown to the public who does not correspond in the least to the mainstream of typical candidates chosen to provide names for institutions:

A woman, lesbian and feminist searching for gender democracy, whose academic career path was anything but straight. She thus represents precisely the unconventionality which the new institute would like to embody.

Gender political challenges

The Gunda Werner Institute's fields of work and action have – with the exception of the focuses 'Gender and security politics' and 'Gender and religion' – a strong domestic political context.

For this reason, a few words about the political framework within which the GWI will be working.

We need the bundling of feminist and gender political power more than ever. Because let's not fool ourselves: gender politics, gender analyses and, even more so, feminist analyses and social blueprints are not in a strong position in the socio-political dispute in Germany. Nowhere are these topics really cross-party politics.

We should not allow ourselves to be deceived by recent reflections on the relevance of feminism and gender democracy, in some political supplements at least. It may, after all, be true that no society, no community, no culture can today avoid a discussion concerning the role of the sexes and that feminism is, perhaps, not historically obsolete – this question is, at least, now again being asked more loudly.

But: **public debate** in Germany is all too often inflamed by family policy issues and/or discussions regarding the compatibility of family and career. Parental benefits, crèche places, all-day schools – all of this sparks (and spark) a fierce debate, particularly in conservative and religious camps as well as within the Christian Democratic parties. It is to the credit of the Minister for Family Affairs that old and new gender roles are being outlined and discussed to an extent not seen for some time. And, also to an extent not seen for some time, the role of men has become a subject of public debate.

Parallel to this, other gender political challenges (health, education, social reform, basic income ...) have virtually no chance of being publically discussed. In addition to this, there have been new polemical attacks (also following the campaign against the Anti-Discrimination Act) against gender political achievements from the right wing conservative camp. The debates in some of the German leading media are paradigmatic for this. The FAZ newspaper and the Spiegel magazine have thus attempted to disavow the emancipatory progress of recent years using malice, allegations and ideological statements from yesteryear. To this end, diffuse fears have been mobilised and aggression has been fanned. In this context it appears that the aim is to assert antiquated ideas of masculinity and to 'kill off' instruments such as *Gender Mainstreaming*. Such articles may thus defy any kind of differentiated discussion on the future fields of activity of gender politics, however the positions articulated here should not be underestimated since they create the atmosphere, tone and environment hostile to further ambitious gender political projects.

We should look more closely at the "conservative feminism" which Minister von der Leyen can now also imagine. Admittedly, it may score with its family policy initiatives; however at the same time we are experiencing a pragmatic backlash in women's and gender politics.

Because in Germany

- Equal opportunity policy approaches are, as a matter of course, subordinated to family policy or completely substituted by it. Parental benefits are exemplary in this context. Admittedly, they may – at least – also include men/fathers as a target group, however their aim, on the one hand, is achieve optimum use of the qualified male and female labour force whilst, on the other, increasing the birth rate among the educated German middle classes.
- Policies for women's advancement now have virtually no public profile or largely concentrate on advancing women's careers. Funding for women's advancement is being cut at both the national and EU level.
- Legislative initiatives against discrimination in women's salaries; an equal opportunities act for business or to give female immigrants residence permit status independent of their marital status are not in sight.

- Groundbreaking instruments such as *Gender Mainstreaming*, which have the potential to focus political initiatives and measures in all institutions and organisations on the goal of gender justice and which are anchored in the EU's Amsterdam Treaty are now again being reduced by the Federal Government to "equality policies focusing on preventive procedures".
- Concepts which could fundamentally alter the hierarchical order of the sexes; the social attribution of "masculine" and "feminine" and the consequent social scale of values and hierarchy fall by the wayside and/or were never taken into consideration in governmental actions (e.g. in education policies).
- Binding guidelines such as quotas, not to mention structural policy measures aimed at breaking up relationships of dependency in partnerships and thus facilitating individuals' independent securing of their existences, have virtually no chance. On the contrary, social and tax policy imperatives continue to preserve the traditional matrimonial and familial model, such as, for example, the new statutory duty of spouses to support a spouse receiving social benefits and standard marital income splitting, which is not finally being done away with but rather in the sense of the family ideology currently being propagated is to become family income splitting.
- Gender politics encompass an active debate on the gender role of boys and men. It has long since become clear that boys and men are also negatively affected by gender blind education, health, migration or labour policies. Statistics show that violence, vandalism, addiction and criminality are male-dominated fields. An active debate on the "crisis of masculinity" necessitates a fundamental gender sensitive, political change of perspective and, above all, also male role models who take up the topic in the political and public arena.

Gunda Werner would, I am convinced, have been happy to contribute to the bringing of feminism, women's and men's politics under one roof. Because it is not the end of independent feminist thought and action and of the differing gender democratic and men's politics approaches. I hope for a reciprocal benefit from taking the perspectives of the other sex and/or of diversity into consideration.

In this spirit I wish us all a stimulating debate and a wonderful celebration today!

Thank you!