

**SWISS CONSENSUS AND DOMINATION: AREAS OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN SWITZERLAND AFTER THE WORLD WAR TWO. COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE WITH SWEDEN, NETHERLANDS, FINLAND, DENMARK AND AUSTRIA.**

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In my presentation, I would like to emphasize the gender aspect of domination in political and labour market fields for two main reasons. First, Switzerland is often considered as a *Sonderfall*, a case apart, in the aspect of political system and of gender equality. Second, studies on consensus do not take in count the importance of gender domination in maintaining social cohesion.

For that purpose, I'll make a brief state of the art of the literature on consensus in order to show what the main areas of study are actually present. Then I'll underline the existing fields of gender inequality in Swiss labour market, education system and social insurances. Finally, based on the studies done in the framework of the European research on six consensual countries (Switzerland, Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Austria and Sweden), I'll make some conclusive remarks on gender inequality in political systems which prior legitimization is the social equality and equal political representation of all social groups.

**Swiss consensus: state of the art.**

The Swiss political system has been described by most of its scholars, or in a broader perspective, by scholars of Swiss history, as a system of concordance or consensus, by opposition to other countries characterized by majority decision-making processes. Regardless of their disciplinary perspective (history, political theory or sociology), these scholars systematically underscore the role of linguistic, religious or regional divides (which are expressed in Switzerland's federalist structure), as well as the role of the classical alignment of political forces along the right/left axis. However, these multiple splits and their differentiated impacts on Swiss democracy have been dealt with in a variety of approaches.

Three major strains of scholarship can be distinguished: the consociational approach in comparative politics; the corporatist approach, in the sense of close collaboration between interest groups and the state; and finally the approach, which stresses the key role played by the integration of political and social forces into the system. This integration could be seen either as the taking into account of divergent interests, or, in a more critical perspective, as the subordination of left wing oppositional forces into a bourgeois hegemony. These three approaches are often debated in scholarly circles and can thus be considered either as

mutually exclusive or complementary. I will therefore tackle them in turn while trying to respect their specific temporal evolution.

*Switzerland and its cultural cleavages: stability of a consociational democracy.*

After having observed both Switzerland's cultural divides and its political and economic stability, consociationalist scholars attempt to isolate the conditions, which ensure the good functioning of Swiss society. In his comparison of Switzerland and Austria, Gerhard Lehmbruch (1967) has developed the idea that proportional democracies, where decisions cannot be reached by the majority principle, have by nature very segmented states. Lehmbruch has also outlined the mainstays of so-called consociational democracies. In order to avoid severe societal disruptions, conflicts must be settled in these countries by the means of bargaining between key political groups. This system is facilitated by constantly changing alliances, which realignments depend on historical periods or issues. Speaking of the Swiss case, Lehmbruch discusses the alliance between the conservative Catholic and the Western French speaking cantons (Romandie) against the cantons dominated by the Liberal Democratic political family (Freisinn), namely Zurich, Basle or Berne; the bourgeois bloc ("Bürgerblock" - alliance between the Union of Farmers, the Liberal Democratic and the employers' peak organization (Vorort)) formed against the organized working class in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> C., as well as the cantonal coalitions between Liberal Democrats and Socialists in the domain of cultural politics. In the system described by Lehmbruch, the political authorities play the role of mediators between interest groups. Accordingly, federalism, direct democracy and the collegial executive coalition introduced in 1959 – in which the main four political parties are represented ("Zauberformel" - The Liberal Democratic Party (2 members), The Christian Democratic Party (2 members), The Democrat Union (1 member), The Socialist Party (2 members)) – all contribute to the reinforcement of proportional democracy. In a recent article, Lehmbruch (1996) underlines the key role of corporatism in this system, by stressing the close collaboration between peak business associations, trade unions and the state apparatus. This institutional setting is characterized by a deep underlying stability, and contrasts with the political alternation in majority-rule countries, where the government has more autonomy and follows a pre-established political project.

Arend Lijphart (1969) has laid the theoretical foundations of consociational democracies. For this author, structurally segmented – or to use his own term, «pillarized» –

countries, where elite groups cooperate at the highest level, are characterized by very stable political systems. This cooperation depends on a docile and weakly politicized citizenry. According to Lijphart's hypothesis (1979), the religious cleavage, followed by the linguistic one, are the main determinants of voting patterns. However, he also underscores that elites are prone to maintain these two divides so as to impede the development of class-consciousness. Switzerland, with its federal structure and overlapping divides is thus related to other consociational political systems.

Jürg Steiner (1970) bases his analysis on a theory of the stability of consociational political systems and, by analytically observing citizens' behaviour, attempts to isolate the conditions, which enable profoundly segmented countries to avoid severe divisive conflicts. According to his study, Switzerland is a non-violent country, where a whole array of mechanisms is implemented to punish and stigmatize radical behaviour and favour negotiation as well as moderate demands. The system functions not only because the capacity for compromise enhances the learning capacity of this mode of societal interaction, but also because the number of persons involved in the political decision making process is relatively limited. Moreover, agreements are reached behind closed doors. Collaboration between politically antagonist actors thus creates favourable conditions for the perpetuation of the bargaining process. The slowness of the whole process, its lack of innovation, the low turnover among its participants as well as the low political participation of the citizenry adds some contradictions into the system and may lower its learning capacity. For this reason, violence may sometimes be necessary to encourage the assimilation of the consensus, but it has to remain circumscribed so as not to destroy the system.

*Consensus or neutralization of the opposition? The role of direct democracy.*

For certain scholars, the relative low intensity of conflicts which characterizes Switzerland is the result of pragmatic politics of the ruling elites, who excel in channelling opposition forces into institutions such as direct democracy. If these antagonisms become an obstacle to the exercise of power, the political system provides means to integrate them as partners, however at a junior level, in the mechanisms of governance.

Leonhard Neidhart (1970), one of the first scholars to study the Swiss political system, tackles the issue of consensus by relating it to an analysis of plebiscitary democracy, in particular facultative referendum. In Neidhart's view, the referendum, which is usually

considered as an expression of the *vox populi*, is transformed into an instrument in the hands of interest groups. Compromises have to be found in order to avoid a sanction from the voters. The referendum capacity of interest groups give them a key access to the political decision making process. In the long run, this phenomenon institutionalizes the constant search for consensus between social groups. Moreover, plebiscitary democracy eases the integration of antagonistic social forces, when these become too restive. It is particularly interesting to underline that at the time when Neidhart wrote his analysis, voters were only male. In Switzerland, women obtained the federal right to vote only in 1971. It is however not even mentioned in his book as a problem of popular democracy.

Hanspeter Kriesi (1998) focuses his study on Swiss peculiarities by adopting a neo-institutionalist perspective. He is not only interested in formal decision instances, but also in the practices and informal procedures which set the framework of political decisions and influence their potential and limits. For this author, the Swiss system of concordance can be described as a strategy to integrate opposition forces in a constant search for compromise and bargaining to solve problematic issues. Direct democracy acts as the safety valve of the system because it enables authorities, in certain circumstances, to bypass the principle of governmental collegiality, while at the same identifying time key opposition forces. Kriesi points to the fact that as the Left participates in a decision making process in which it is underrepresented, it is forced to revise downwards its demands while legitimizing the system. Kriesi also underlines the lack of transparency of extra-parliamentary commissions and the slowness of political procedures.

*Liberal corporatism: the Swiss answer to class divisions.*

The theory of corporatism or neo-corporatism, understood as a close collaboration between the state and peak associations, had already been signalled by Lehbruch. Using this theory enables us to take into account class divisions in the analysis of consensus.

According to Katzenstein (1984), Switzerland has a regime of democratic corporatism. This system is characterized by an ideology of social partnership, by a centralised system of representation of interests and by an informal and voluntary collaboration of social, economic and political interests. The author underlines the relative weakness of the representation of the left but considers nevertheless that the good functioning of economy and the fact that exportation is the leading sector lead to a corporatist connection between trade unions and

employer's interests within the global system of liberal capitalism (1984: 30). Katzenstein studies as much social forces as institutional structures and also includes exchanges between actors. He concludes that the political and economic success of Switzerland is due to its potential of economic flexibility and its economic stability; in other words, the successful integration of its economy in international economy and the close collaboration between different interest groups enable the established capitalist system to function without important hindrances (1984:131).

François Masnata and Claire Rubattel (1995) have applied such an approach to the case of Switzerland. For these two authors, consensus does not mean the absence of conflicts, but rather non-decision, imposed by the predominant role played by business interest groups in the inner workings of the federal administration and by their overrepresentation in the extra-parliamentary commissions responsible for the elaboration of legislation. The fact that trade union representatives collaborate with these commissions only strengthens the corporatist dimension, notably in labour relations. The effective corporatism reinforces the idea that politics can manage and even avoid conflicts and oppositional dynamics. By concealing real social relations, consensus considerably reduces the range of potential alternatives and gives the impression that the Swiss political system is ineluctable. The overlap between political, economic, military and cultural elites gives priority to politics that are oriented towards the continuation of economic and social policies favouring these same elites. Consensus is thus established, but at the detriment of specific social groups: the lower classes, but also foreigners and women. Claire Rubattel, in one of the rare discussions of gender relations in conjunction to the Swiss political and cultural system, stresses the patriarchal nature of the Swiss system and its impact on the lack, or the belated implementations, of policies regarding women, especially in the domain of labour rights, suffrage, social policy or taxation.

*Economic growth and the capital reserves of the Swiss ruling class: key aspects of political consensus.*

Even if those different approaches to study consensualism diverge, we can draw two main characteristic of Swiss political system: a small group that constitute ruling elite and economic prosperity. The close overlap of economic interests in the political system and the fact that actors often hold several mandates concurrently may endanger the system when economic downturns happen. However, these same overlaps enable the ruling elites to

channel politics into paths, which correspond to their vested interests by using financial compensations, which defuse potential violent confrontations.

According to Jost (2001), consensus must be understood as a form of governance, which, in specific periods, enables to avoid direct confrontation. However, consensus is not at all synonymous with absence of conflicts. Swiss consensus was first defined in a framework of Liberal Democratic dominance, and then by a larger bourgeois coalition against the Left. The end of the 19th C. and large tracts of the 20th C. have been characterized by the political repression of the Left. If it is true that, after this period, political and social antagonisms were settled through compromise, the roots of this compromise are to be found in economic growth. The important capital reserves of the economic elites enabled them to grant some concessions to opposition forces. Moreover, coercion and repression did not disappear, but shifted towards other social groups, such as foreign workers and immigrants. As for the links between direct democracy and compromise, Jost underlines that associations representing business interests have always had at their disposal more important financial means than their adversaries and thus can effectively use the threat of facultative referendum in order to influence the decision making process.

In his empirical study, Marcus Freitag (2001) demonstrates the key role of social capital in the Swiss political process. If citizens do not participate actively in political institutions, they are heavily involved in a whole range of associative and community groups, which improve the level of mutual trust and contribute to the learning process of solving conflicts by mutual consent. However, it must be stressed that such social capital is proportionately higher in affluent social groups.

### **Consensualism and dominance: ruling “elite” and gender segregation**

Consensualism in Switzerland does not mean an egalitarian participation in power and wealth for all, but it is rather a mode dominants use to settle social conflicts. The dominants are, in their majority, Swiss men with a very high education level and come from the wealthiest part of society. They defend the interests of big companies or of Swiss banks in which their own advantages are. For many structural and conjectural reasons, the closed circle of these rulers succeeds in having the majority of Swiss population identify with their interests, consequently presented as aiming at the "common good". Nevertheless, an effective dominance is exercised over a great part of the population. I will consider in this article two

modes of dominance among the most significant and that can be found throughout practically the whole Swiss history: bourgeois dominance and masculine dominance. On this base, we can consider that the domination exerted in political and economical field on women constitute an enriching study of Swiss consensus and its legitimization.

For the purpose of this presentation, I'll draw briefly a picture of the ruling class considering they most obvious characteristics. It would allow me to give some examples of gender domination considering three important social areas: education, labour market and social insurance. The main purpose is to show how by limiting the number of people involved in decision making process and the existence of a quite coherent "elite" in Switzerland, social costs are transferred to particular part of the population in this case women as a social group. During a great part of the 20th century, women are a population with rights unequal to men's, in the labour market as well as in social, economic or political spheres. Equality in Constitution was only introduced in 1991, but Switzerland remains a deeply patriarchal country.

The investigation of gender relationships is supposedly focused on groups of men and women within a dynamic set, where roles are socially built and maintained. Such a focus inevitably influences social statuses and politics. Therefore, it is not a question of pointing women as being part in the society as much as marginalizing them as being a specific group within the studies. Nevertheless, biologic sex matters in the distribution of the power within institutions, within the corporatist organizations. It is also a dimension, which counts in all political domains. This applies as much to the fields of decisions which contain a will to end gender inequalities (for example the incentive legislations for the wage equality) as, by omission, to the fields in which the dimension of gender relationships does not intervene directly (for example the norm of the masculine worker full-time, implicates different corporatist negotiations that if norm was the partial employment female worker).

#### *Outlined features of the ruling class.*

The Radical Democratic Party, close to economic circles, used to be the dominant party from the creation of the Confederation until the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> World War, during which time it formed a governmental alliance with the Christian Democratic People's Party (Parti Démocratique Chrétien), as well as an alliance called the "bourgeois block" with the farmers' associations in order to fight against the workers' movement (Jost 2001: 61). Furthermore,

economic federations are developed in Switzerland even before political parties are created and therefore can really lead a policy defending their interests. These federations are not only represented in parliamentary and governmental systems in which they have representatives, but they are also in the position to supply data for federal decisions (Neidhart 1970). The interest groups find another field to exercise their influence in the legislative process, since the elaboration of bills can be strongly influenced in the pre-parliamentary phases.

The dominance of the right does not wear off at all when the socialists acquire more seats in the parliament nor when they accede to the government (in 1943). First of all, the right still holds the majority in the executive and in the legislature and all governmental decisions must be taken by collegial agreement. Secondly, the right-wing parliamentary majority elects the members of the government and very often the official candidates of the Socialist Party are ousted to the advantage of the least radical actors. Thirdly, in the informal decision-making circles, the left is underrepresented and decisions in economy and finances depend on "experts" from the private economy.

The Swiss senior official positions are also characterized by the low representation of the left and of women. Thus, Paolo Urio, quoted in Masnata's work (1995: 242) establishes that, in the eighties, to reach the top of public administration it is better not to be a woman (the odds are 0.6%), to have a university degree (70% of senior officials have one), to come from a well-off social class and be an officer in the army (half of them are) and finally be a member of a political party (the case for 64% of them) and even better, be a sympathizer or a member of the Radical Democratic Party (as 55% of the senior officials declare they are). As a general rule, several of these characteristics have to be cumulated. The militia system of the Swiss army intensifies the coherence of the ruling circle. It allows actually the reinforcement of the links between executives and officers and gives them greater symbolic power.

*Cultural capital: a not very visible yet real selection.*

A high level of education seems to be a necessary condition in order to be a part of the ruling circles. The limitative aspect of this requirement cannot be understood without grasping how the very selective Swiss educational system works.

At first sight, education in Switzerland does not appear to be very elitist since there is no clear separation between private and public schools, nor any referential institution for the wealthiest minority of the population. However, a hierarchal system is established very early, in the first years of school. The education influences greatly the future working life of

children, while their professional orientations depend on the family circles' aspirations and financial means. Apprenticeships, chosen by a great number of children after compulsory education, are supposed to institute a professional training as an alternative to studies but in reality it ensures available skilled workers according to the needs of the labour market. The choice of professional training is highly gendered. Thus, according to statistics, since 1990, there has been almost no evolution in the « choice » girls and boys make. Women make up two thirds of office, health and sales jobs, whereas men lean towards metallurgy, machine industry and technical jobs. This difference in the nature of the work has its pending in income and access to job positions (unemployment), but also in working hours and part-time work. Little efforts are made to change this situation on the training level.

Furthermore, the professional specialization leaves only few time devoted to general knowledge courses: the lack of education influences the level of politicisation and the participation of citizens. The complexity of legislative language, notably in the popular voting prospectus, excludes a part of the population from the exercise of their rights (Jost 2001: 65) or does not allow them to have critical view on the subjects. A recent international comparative study on education (PISA2000) establishes that in Switzerland approximately 40% of 15-year-old students fail to read and understand a text and very few reach a level of complex and critical reading. The study links these results with the strong segmentation in compulsory school and insists also on the limited possibilities of social mobility offered by the Swiss educational system.

Women are very much disadvantaged in the educational system, beside the professional training: while their proportion is equal to the men's, in primary and secondary levels, in the third level, that of higher education, they are only 47 to 100 men (Stämpfli 1994: 691). Their presence diminishes even more at the higher levels of academic hierarchy (CFQF 1998/II: Ch. 3). In general, the more expensive the education gets, the more the proportion of women tends to diminish (CSDE and SSP 1996: 7).

The level of education is very closely linked to the possibility of being employed so the inegalitarian status of women in the educational system has consequences in the labour market system

[http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/fr/index/themen/systemes\\_d\\_indicateurs/indicateurs\\_du\\_systeme/bildungsytemindikatoren.indicator.50104.print.html](http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/fr/index/themen/systemes_d_indicateurs/indicateurs_du_systeme/bildungsytemindikatoren.indicator.50104.print.html)

So as women enter a so-called superior degree course, it loses prestige and qualification and education women can attend to is devaluated. This levelling down pushes

equality a little more out of reach. This process can be compared historically to the massive entry of women in tertiary sector positions starting end of World War I when growing needs of labour open real status change possibilities for women, breach immediately limited by a lowering of social status and a deterioration of working conditions for women but also for men who now find themselves in a devaluated field. In 2003, less than 30% of total accreditations in law, exact and natural sciences and medicine were granted to women; and in economics, 100% were for men

([http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/fr/index/themen/systemes\\_d\\_indicateurs/indicateurs\\_du\\_systeme/bildungsytemindikatoren.indicator.50104.print.html](http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/fr/index/themen/systemes_d_indicateurs/indicateurs_du_systeme/bildungsytemindikatoren.indicator.50104.print.html)).

In 2004 in Switzerland, the rate of people having a University degree amongst 27 years old permanent residents was 11%. For women, this same rate is 9% while for men it is around 12%. This rate is constantly rising since the 80s, with a very significant increase for women

([http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/fr/index/themen/systemes\\_d\\_indicateurs/indicateurs\\_des\\_hautes/hochschulindikatoren.indicator.10404.html](http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/fr/index/themen/systemes_d_indicateurs/indicateurs_des_hautes/hochschulindikatoren.indicator.10404.html))

Nevertheless, if we consider that in parliamentary and administrative institutions in Switzerland, over 70% of people have university degrees (Kriesi, 1995), we are facing obvious inequalities regarding interest representation and power in this country. The employment rate and level of education are directly connected, the first going up as does education level. In 2003, 67% of the population aged 25 to 64 without post-obligatory education have a job, while for people with a tertiary degree (the highest), up to 90% have one. For the feminine population, the correlation remains, but the rates go down : 60% of those without post-obligatory education and 83% of those with a high level of education have a remunerated activity.

Even if women's education level is higher then in the year 2000 than in the 80s, men are in 2000 17% to have finished compulsory schooling against 28% of women. The proportion of men to have finished a high vocational training is twice as high as that of women and men remain more amongst people with university or "haute école" education. Technical courses remain men's privilege : with 15% of women ending such courses, Switzerland is before last in the OCDE ranking in 2001 (OFS; August 2005).

### *Gendered disadvantages in Swiss welfare State*

In Switzerland, social insurance is in their majority linked with the exercise of a lucrative activity. As women only represent 34% of paid work (but 88% for unpaid work)

(CSDE and SSP 1996: 7), therefore they are the main excluded category from social insurance, notably from the state pensions (AVS), but also from unemployment insurance and accident insurance. When women are accounted for in the benefits they are only granted minimal benefits since they do not work as long and as continuously as men (Martin 2002: 69).

And, already in the elaboration of the welfare state, women were left-out. If we take the example of the AVS, the conditions of contributions and benefits turn out to be very disadvantageous to married women. They lose their right to individual benefits after getting married, and their contributions cannot fill in their husband's loss of contributions and cannot be used to increase the couple's allowance if the husband's income does not allow the maximum allowance. Furthermore, women's contributions only cover two types of benefits: for motherless orphans and for individual allowance (for singles) while for men, benefits can cover allowances for the couple, in case of widowhood, for their wife, etc. Women contribute then for general solidarity though they are excluded from benefits (CFQF 1998/I: Ch. 3.3). This functioning of the insurance imposes as only worthy model the one of the nuclear family, on top of which are the nurturing man and the home dedicated woman.

This patriarchal hierarchy inscribed in the insurance system undoubtedly influences other domains of social life. The domestic responsibility, incumbent upon the mother, hinders the creation of an infrastructure for the custody of children. Figures in Switzerland are in this respect disastrous: in 1996, only 4.2% of children younger than 14 could benefit from custody place outside the family circle (CSDE and SSP 1996: 8). The situation is evolving today but children must be enlisted on a day-nursery before even before being conceived if the parents want to be sure their child finds a place in the day-nursery when the mother has to or wants to go back to work or to her studies. Absurd "consensual" solutions were found: in the city of Zurich, for example, by raising considerably the price of day-nurseries, the waiting lists have been transformed into vacant places (CSDE and SSP 1996: 5), this penalizing women from the least well-off strata of the population.

The tenth revision of the AVS which came into force in 1997 brings more equality to women in the benefits: the pair's allowance can be transformed into two individual allowances and an education bonus or children and parents' care count as contributions. These modifications were however accompanied with a rise of the age of contribution for women from 62 to 64 (CFQF 1995: 165). Once again, the most penalized women are those with trying jobs. The bourgeois parties passed the austerity of the State in that matter for a progress in gender equality in accordance with the constitutional article 4. 2. which in 1981 instituted

gender equality (Stämpfli 1994: 699). Yet, in many regards, these very parties do not show themselves very inclined to set up gender equality. Economic federations issued for example a moratorium on the establishment of a maternity insurance that would enable women to combine paid work and motherhood (CSDE and SSP 1996: 5).

*The inequality in Swiss labour market.*

In the domain of labour market, women are also discriminated against. The salary difference of 30% to the disadvantage of women is very striking but what is even more is the silent acceptance of this discriminatory principle. When in 1952 Switzerland was invited to ratify the No 100 Convention of the International Work Organisation, the Federal Council sends a message to the parliament recommending them not to adopt it. It was about equal salary for equal labour. The arguments of the government were on one hand that it was hard to determinate the value of work and on the other that this principle cannot be applied to private economy since salaries are set on the basis of private contracts. We have here, once again, the individualisation of working conditions in order to avoid common demands. This way of proceeding is also to the disadvantage of all employees, but for women, the oppression is all the stronger since trade unions show little concern for gender demands. In that respect, the collective work contracts (CCT) are significant: in 1993, one "CCT" out of three explicitly contains discriminatory hiring conditions towards women (CFQF 1998/II: Ch. 3.2.), notwithstanding the gender equality article of 1981. Once more, the formulation of the law is ambiguous enough to benefit the economic circles. It is not about the obligation for employers to pay the same salaries, but about a right that could be claimed by employees by appealing to judiciary authorities. The balance of power being unequal and salary confidentiality being still a well-inscribed value, the odds of reaching one day salary equality are thin. Furthermore, there is in Switzerland a very strong resistance to women's emancipation, manifested by a negative attitude towards feminism.

The late access of women to political rights has often been blamed on direct democracy. There have been indeed 136 voting polls on the subject on federal and cantonal levels between 1919 and 1984. But as Ballmer-Cao notes (CFQF 1995: 162), popular votes are an elegant way found by rulers not to discuss difficult issues.

Thanks to all these examples, dominance over women can be said to be benefiting the economic circles (with lesser salary and social welfare) but also men in general enabled by the traditional family model to be the ruler, at least at home. The order of gender and women's

precariousness thus function as a social safety valve but in the same time hinders the economy when the demand of labour forces grows.

### **Comparative perspective in conclusion : the impossible gender equality?<sup>1</sup>**

The fact that the social group "women" is consistently dominated in consensual democracies reveals the permanence, of a systematic exclusion, even in countries where social order is justified by the will of cohesion and the idea of equal distribution of rights and powers. When looking at men and women as different social groups, it becomes evident that within the "poor" population women are unfailingly represented (Penz 2005: 3, Natchkova 2005: 5). They constitute a working force distinctly less remunerated, even when considering full-time employment. Manifestly, economic branches are gendered (Natchkova 2005: 4, Penz 2005: 3, Hendriks 2005: 9) and wage differences between men and women are present in all countries: as in Denmark, wage differences in 2005 are about 13% in public sectors and 20% in private sectors (Schmidt-Hansen 2005: 7).

More broadly, when women achieve to enter in labour market (in Netherlands for example their participation rate growth is particularly strong since the 1980's (Hendriks 2005: 9)), they get mostly precarious, partial employment jobs or fixed-term contracts (ibid, Sunell et al. 2005: 12, Boräng et al. 2005: 6, 12). In terms of rights, work conditions and access to social security, having such employment particularities is clearly disadvantageous, (Hendriks 2005: 9, Boräng et al 2005:6, Sunell et al 2005: 11, Natchkova 2005: 3, 4; Penz 2005: 3). These similarities to female employment (part-time or underemployment, lower wages, service sector work) illustrate also that structural modifications of labour market in those countries have a great effect on women's social group. The general accepted consensus of economic competitiveness is put back on a specific social group.

Partial employment also has an impact upon the presentation of rights in union organizations (Boräng et al 2005: 37). However, during the last decade, important advances have been noticed first in Denmark, where female affiliation in labour unions increases even if unions remain predominantly male (Schmidt-Hansen 2005: 8), and second in Sweden,

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is based on six national reports done for the European research. You can find them on [www.smallcons.nl](http://www.smallcons.nl) WP5 : « Reconsidering the Dutch Corporatist Consensus » By C. Hendriks ; « Research on the Domination Dimension: Switzerland » By N. Natchkova ; « Power and Dominance in Danish Consensualism » By U. Schmidt-Hansen ; « Research of the dominance dimension: Finland » By M. Sunell in cooperation with J. Vauhkonen and with supplements by P. Kettunen) ; « Research of the Dominance Dimension: Austria » By O. Penz ; « Swedish Corporatism 1970-2005: Winners and Losers » By F. Boräng, J. Lindvall & M. Anthonsen).

where labour market legislations gave non-union's members (partly women) a better access to unemployment security schemes (Boräng et al 2005: 1).

The feeble presence of women on the labour market and their more precarious status mirror the fact that the reconciliation of the family with a profitable activity is not always made easy in studied countries (Penz 2005: 4, Sunell et al 2005: 13, Natchkova 2005: 6). This also suggests that in spite of social transformations, children and non-remunerated job continue being part of women's social identity and responsibility. The problems attached to the distribution of domestic tasks and to the nursing of children are not raised by the Swedish and Dutch reports. This may be due on one hand to better-developed State facilities or on the other hand to a mere absence of public debates on the matter. Nevertheless, all reports, taking into account poverty rate statistics, indicate that the higher number of children in a household increases poverty risks of those households and that this is even more true for monoparental households (Penz 2005: 3; Natchkova 2005: 5, Schmidt-Hansen 2005: 5, Hendriks 2005: 6). The unequal proportion of men and women in the labour market, without being absolutely conscientious or *Manichean*, renders the modification of the definition of "common good" easier. Moreover, even if the usual norm of a native male worker having a full-time job at a determined length represents only partly the economic reality, such a norm is always considered in corporatist negotiations through union organizations, as it easily fits a majority of unionists. In spite of noticeable improvements of labour unions representativeness in the different studied countries, these institutions evolve only slowly and therefore partly lose the capacity to influence new political orientations efficiently. Labour market gender segregation and under-representation in corporatist agreement mirror ideological marginalization. For example, anti-feminism is particularly pinpointed in the Austrian, Swiss, Swedish and Finnish reports (Penz 2005: 9, Natchkova 2005: 16, Boräng et al 2005: 38 and Sunell et al 2005: 18).

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