

FEMINISM AS A POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

Nikolay POPOV

“Neofit Rilski” South-West University, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria
npopovilir@abv.bg

Abstract: *Feminism is one of the most important ideologies in the contemporary society. It influences not only the inter-political process but also international one. The word “feminism” has been named word of the year by the American dictionary Merriam-Webster in 2017.*

Keywords: feminism, politics, ideology, society, social media

1. Introduction

Destutt de Tracy (1754-1836) coined the word „ideology” in 1796. The notion of ideology was associated with science for a short period of time. At a fast clip, it acquires a pejorative nature and is often perceived as opposed to scientific approaches.

According to Iain MacKenzie ideologies contribute to understand and apprehend the world’s complex social relations. They can provide a description of society, environment and reality. This description serves as an intellectual map which provides us orientation and helps us forming and stating our attitude within the complex social environment we live. In order to implement this function ideologies are also characterized by the fact that they consist of a combination of political ideas. These political ideas need to describe and construct a concept of the best form of human governance and society organization. It results from this that ideology must comprise at least two components: a map of reality and a notion of the ideal society. That is to say ideology provides a description of the existing relations in the social and political public

spheres, and a plan of the way how they should be organized as well. [1]

Thus examined, political ideologies are varied and modifying according to the society development. Some of them alter their social influence or new ones arise. One of these newly political ideologies is feminism. This ideology affects over political process, as nationalism does in European Union. As Rumyana Popova argued “Contemporary nationalism manifesting nowadays in Europe is mainly associated with the European integration deepening processes and the effects of the globalization”. [2]

2. Feminism and politics

The definition of the aims and political lexis of modern feminism is related to Enlightenment and French Revolution because of its relation to the contraposition to the standing rules, norms and dogmas in society. In this sense, feminism is identified by the desire to acknowledge the women’s rights and equality, as well the different attitude towards the perception of women. [3] The term feminism is used for the first time in English in the end of the XVII century. During this particular historical period, the social status of women was unenviable.

They did not have any rights to vote, didn't have access to education, a significant number of occupations and activities were prohibited and not allowed for them. Their legal status was similar to children's, for example married women did not have a title and their earnings were their husbands' possession. [4]

By the end of XIX century in America and Great Britain, women had to a greater extent acquired their legal independence and larger access to education. They had also earned some achievements and acquisitions in terms of their participation in public life and political debate. Restrictions and non-admission of female participation in determinate activities results in remarkable feminist activity in the last years of the century.

The results of the manifestations of the ideology of feminism are in close relation to the acquisition of women's political rights. This happened for the first time in New Zealand in 1894, and shortly after that this trend has spread in most part of the modern world. In the first decades of the XX century, women in Great Britain and United States also gained voting rights. This resulted from a number of reasons, namely the belief women could have a preserving and stabilizing role, to be full members of society, proven by their involvement and contribution to the overcome of war, but also by the pre-war women's electoral rights movements.

During that period feminism was defined as "quiet", but owned its characteristic, connected to various forms of activities and debating. One of the debates related to the demand of the liberal feminists for equality between women and men, which implies the equal treatment of the states for the two sexes. One of the important issues is the legislation which protects women from unhealthy occupations and professions as well as the long working hours, which was actually accepted differently by liberal feminists and those supporting policies ensuring women's welfare.

Feminism is usually seen as a way of perceiving world in terms of women. A key element of this ideology is the patriarchy which is seen as a system within the society where male power suppresses women. This is implemented through the established institutions in all spheres of public life. It is for this reason that as an ideology, feminism criticizes and opposes the patriarchy, fighting against and insisting on the women's emancipation in society. Contemporary circumstances involve many people committed to the feminism. Many of them form points of intersection to other political ideologies. For example, these are liberal feminists, Marxist feminists, anarchist feminists etc. This, however, does not mean that feminism uses the views, ideas and beliefs of social development from other political ideologies. On the contrary, feminist ideology develops and enriches not only its own system of beliefs, it also helps to enrich others. [5]

The ideas of feminism are connected to the belief of the unequal status compared to men. In their view, this status is not a result of the natural determination due to biological differences and should therefore be resisted and changed. Gender inequality is the main difference between feminism and other political ideologies. It is this inequality which implies a different vision of this ideology over politics and its scope and objectives, placing it at the center of the political process. In regard to the development of its ideas and conception of society, feminism is not static, but dynamic. [6]

As already noted, the variety of feminism is the basis of constant disputes among its wings. In terms of equality, they could acquire a different comprehension. It finds expression both as a formal legal equality and as equal opportunities, respect and attitude as well. In relation to sexuality and gender self-determination, there also exist differing standpoints.

3. Feminism in XX century

Acquiring voting rights does not change politics as feminists have hoped. Delivering women's problems at the heart of the political process, the wider involvement of women in public life and moral change do not happen as expected. However, the achievements accomplished during the period between the World War I and World War II cannot be denied.

After World War II, a significant influence on the development of modern liberal feminism and on the second wave of the women's movement was made by American writer Betty Friedan (1921-2006), who in 1962 published the book „The Feminine Mystique”. Her views have affected and have led to substantial changes in American and other societies all over the world. The main critique she has expressed is focused on the existing concept for the place and role of women in society only as housewives and giving birth to children. This is why she calls up on women to approach to the feminist rights acquired to that time in order to achieve their social freedom. Betty Friedan also supports the continuous actions for suppression of other forms of discrimination. This resulted in the foundation of National Organization for Women in 1966. The organization aims to oppose and succeed against discrimination by being a pressure group and by using the resources of law in the political process. The tasks they have set are related to Equal Rights Amendment to the US Constitution, afterwards to the demands for more state care of children, more involvement of men in housework and childcare, so women could be enabled with possibilities of professional realization. Specific measures connected to positive discrimination in terms of occupations and women's involvement in political life as compensation, have also been supported.

In the XX century feminism achieved huge advancement in fulfilling the defence of its objectives and principles. The success of women in spheres like education,

employment and suffrage is unarguable. Despite all of these remarkable achievements, full equality hasn't been yet reached even in developed countries. To a large extent, public authority is still being carried out by men and in terms of housework occupations, unequal payment and domestic violence, women meet great challenges. Although contemporary feminism differs from feminism in the past, the ideology still has grounds and objectives to fulfil by the various movements however contradictions may have occurred between them. [7]

4. Conclusion

As a political ideology, feminism has sufficient grounds for its active presence in modern reality. The word “feminism” has been named word of the year by the American dictionary Merriam-Webster in 2017. The interest towards the term increased in 2017 due to a number of events. Some of them are: Women's March on January, 2017; revelations of sexual harassment and violence in various spheres of social life and the joining of many women to social networks using #MeToo hash tag to state that they have been subjected to such behavior as well. [8] As Slavyanka Angelova argued “social media involves a large number of people. They are a communication tool and can unite people who share a cause or point of view”. [9] Feminism can use the force of social media to achieve its goals.

Even in more developed regions over the world, there are a variety of standpoints, interests, values and opinions regarding the status and rights of women. Within the framework of the Council of Europe and also among the Member States of the European Union, significant discussions and controversies have led to the establishment of the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Some Member States have not ratified the Convention and are opposed to certain

ambiguities in it. Another example of the existing inequality is the difference in labor salaries.

Beyond dispute, as a political ideology, feminism has the influence and development perspective within the political processes at national, regional, continental and global levels. However, the impact of this political ideology directly depends on various factors. The peculiarities of culture, history, traditions, religion etc., would determine the forms of feminism manifestations at different levels. The objective reality is what feminist

organizations would need to take into account when attempting to influence the implementation of their goals. Except for these factors, the forms of government and states participation in international organizations and agreements are also of a great importance. As Manol Stanin argued "Each right is placed into a system of legal obligations that determine the boundaries of its implementation in the legal reality". [10] It is obviously that our world is world of norms and all actions of the political movements are determinate by legal norms.

References

- [1] Eccleshall, Robert and others, *Political Ideologies – an introduction*. New York, 1998, p. 3.
- [2] Popova, R. *Nationalism in Europe: Main Typologies and Contemporary Manifestations*. Revista Europa Del Este Unida Issn 0719-7284 – Publicación Semestral – Número 2 – Julio/Diciembre 2016, p. 9.
- [3] *Енциклопедия на политическата мисъл*. Блекуел, съставители: Дейвид Милър и др., ЦИД, С., 1997, с. 570-571.
- [4] *Contemporary Political Ideologies*. Edited by Roger Eatwell and Anthony Wright, Continuum International Publishing Group, 1999, p. 208.
- [5] McLean, Iain. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1996, p. 180.
- [6] *Contemporary Political Ideologies*. Edited by Roger Eatwell and Anthony Wright, Continuum International Publishing Group, 1999, p. 206-207.
- [7] *Contemporary Political Ideologies*. Edited by Roger Eatwell and Anthony Wright, Continuum International Publishing Group, 1999, p. 225.
- [8] <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/word-of-the-year-2017-feminism>
- [9] Angelova, Sl. *The Influence of Social Media on Social Processes*. Revista Europa del Este Unida, Número 3 Enero - Junio 2017, p. 10.
- [10] Stanin, M. *Rights within Obligations and Responsibilities*, in: scientific collection "Economic, social and administrative approachesto the knowledge-based organization", Volume II, Land Forces Academy "Nicolae Balchesku", p. 377, Sibiu, Romania, 2016.