

A Women's Suit

'My European dream will never turn into an American dream' - says Iwona Reichardt sitting by the front of a table in one of conference rooms in European Solidarity Centre (Gdansk, Poland).

'I was in Washington D.C. for purely personal reasons, because my husband is an American. This is exactly where I started my professional life, I was 25 at that time and I worked for Foreign Policy magazine. I think I have learned there a good quality Anglo-Saxon journalism, fact checking, interpretation, but I missed Europe in America a lot. I will never regret this experience, because it taught me also certain values, for example gender equality. In this case Poland is still very much behind.'

This woman, wearing a grey chequered top with a geometric shaped necklace and mill washed denim jeans, has a familiar appearance and opened mind. Time to time, she brushes her blond hairsbreadth and slides her hands against the thighs – a sign of nervousness. But looking into shining eyes, one can recognise a real enthusiasm and passion at her work. Iwona's friendly and modest behaviour makes people feel an equality between the speaker and audience, even evokes a feeling of closeness.

'We are a bit old-fashioned, focusing on the quality of journalism, not scandals.' - introduces Iwona her work for English edition of the magazine New Eastern Europe, where she holds a post of editor and lead translator. Apart from her flexible position in team of only three constant co-workers, she also contributes to a Polish feminist magazine called Zadra.

Iwona has a strong view about the relationship between genders and emphasizes the differences amongst countries. 'I did a series of interviews with women in Warsaw, Kiyv and Berlin. Women are present, they can graduate from political science, from international relations, they can even get a job. But when we have conferences and all these ambitious events, we suddenly realise that there is place only for men. They create almost a barricade around themselves, it's very hard to get in and women have to become tough. I oppose this philosophy, because I don't think that we have to become men to be heard.' Iwona also mentions that men should not be so 'aggressive' and they should not expect men's behaviour from women. There is something in women's character what makes them act more polite and emphatic, but it should not be considered submissiveness. Talking about these issues, Iwona's commitment to topic is obvious while she's leaning over the table, presenting her arguments. Calmness has changed into passion and involvement.

'When it comes to express my values, I don't care if other people call me a frustrated feminist, you know I have two kids, but...society has a stereotype of a feminist who isn't married, who doesn't have a boyfriend or has a different sexual orientation. I tell them that I love my family, I love spending time with them. This is something in America they understand, but in Poland it is still problematic.' Having a family and children does not mean that a woman cannot fight for her rights or build her career anymore.

Iwona believes that the Polish society needs a transformation to become more open-minded. Women's status is a cultural question related to the history and in Poland also associated with the Catholic Church. Despite an existing abortion law in Poland, which is already one of the most restrictive in Europe, the current Parliament, where majority is held by the Law and Justice (PiS) party is considering a bill that would introduce a near complete abortion ban. Under the new law women undertaking abortion would be punished. According to Iwona, the fact that such proposals are considered could be a result of women who stayed silent in the past and let men lead and decide. Now, the new generation of women should pay attention to preserve and promote their interests. As a matter of fact, thousands of women are already protesting against the proposed legislation, but Iwona is not optimistic in this case. 'Unfortunately, the new generation of women is more conservative than mine. I think we made some sort of mistake - while building our new democratic country, we spent too much time working on it and didn't spend enough time with our children teaching them values.'

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