The following article presents the social and cultural background behind the operations of the Council of Europe (CoE) Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence in Poland. These social and cultural conditions have significant bearing on the application of the provisions of the Convention in Poland and on related political decisions. The first section of the article concerns the reception of the Convention in Poland. Subsequently, it discusses the social, economic and legal conditions of the functioning of women in Polish society, including legal standards of equality between men and women. These issues are presented against the backdrop of official statistics on violence against women and domestic violence. The next part of the article focuses on legal regulations of the CoE Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence: the practical context of Poland. Of particular importance here is the protection of children. Observations concerning the influence of civil society on the functioning of the Convention in Poland conclude the article.

Reception of the Convention in Poland

Poland signed the Council of Europe (CoE) Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence on 18 December 2012, but this Act only came into force on 1 August 2015. Poland was the seventeenth country to ratify the Convention.

Ratified international agreements have the status of universally binding laws in Poland and are thus applied directly; therefore, the Convention is now an integral part of the apparatus for protection of human rights, including the safety of women and, in the broader context, also of children regardless of sex. This Act can also be considered part of the framework for combating and preventing domestic violence. Even prior to its accession to the Convention, Poland employed certain legal and institutional instruments that were in agreement with the spirit of the Act in question. Yet, the Convention introduces legal solutions that instil higher standards of protection, including specific means of responding to discrimination and acts of violence conditioned by culture.

The introduction of the Convention in Poland allows for closer examination of a situation in

which socially important matters that arouse intense emotions become a tool in the struggle for political power. Examples may include debates and decisions of authorities both preceding and following the entry into force of the CoE Convention. To give one example, the signing and ratification of the Convention were accompanied by debates which questioned its purpose and validity. Shortly after the signing, the right-oriented Polish government took steps towards renunciation, which prompted strong reaction from the civil society. Such a strong social response was directly linked to the culturally conditioned position of women in Poland. It was also the proof that the contemporary opposition does not have to form a cohesive group, unified by shared political ideas. Contemporary opposition movements does not have to be a political party. It may be a social group without formalised bonds. Social issues have always been a factor that could unite communities of protest and such was the case in Poland. The 'dispersed opposition' was led by a strong need to protect the rights that had been to date guaranteed by law.

Culturally and Historically Conditioned Position of Women in Poland

The application of the Convention in Poland, the social reception of this Act and its consequences for public authorities and politicians are closely tied to the position of women in Polish society. Their current position arises from the conditions in which Polish society has operated in the last few hundred years and which can be seen as a conglomerate of historical, cultural, or – more specifically – religious, social and even geographical factors.

It seems clear that the social position of any group in any society is determined by both the history of the entire society as well as the roles that this group had to fulfil in the context of specific historical events. The same is true of the current situation of Polish women. It may be said that this position is and has been, relatively high; nevertheless, this does not mean that Poland is free from violence against women or its social consequences.

The primary factor worth considering is the impact of the Poland's geographical location on its history and; consequently, on the social position of its female inhabitants. On closer inspection the history of the country appears to have been rather 'drafty' as Poland has been involved, willingly or not, in almost every major armed conflict in Europe, except,

perhaps, for the religious wars. The spatial location of Poland is neither that of an island nor that of a peninsula and closer examination of the history of armed conflict in Central Europe reveals that the absence of significant natural barriers hindering free movement of troops is one of the reasons why wars were such an frequent occurrence in the Polish past. The country also happened to (literally) stand in the way of its neighbours' economic interests, which brought about the partition of Poland and the subsequent struggle for national independence.

Taking into account that it were usually men who participated in armed conflicts – at least until World War II – Polish women were forced to take the economy and welfare of their families into their own hands. The reason behind this were not men's wishes, but rather their absence; for decades they fought and died in wars, they were deported to Siberia or kept in Gulags. These events contributed to the relatively strong position of women with regard to their economic rights and their "social say".

After the Second World War, Poland got into the orbit of socialism, which obviously had immense social consequences. Following World War II, the country was totally destroyed and the extermination of its population continued. Women were faced with very clear expectations regarding their social role. They were expected to engage in professional activity, but these expectations did not bring about equality in other spheres. On the home front, men might have helped, but women still bore the burden.

Lifestyle choices of the period also revealed the emancipation of women. The same tendency is described by A. G. Dijkstra and J. Plantega (2003) who claim that after the year 1950, socialist governments also emphasized the equality of men and women; they promoted the acquisition of the same education and the fulfilment of the same roles on the labour market. As a result, in 1985 the participation of women in the labour market in centrally planned economies was higher than in most of the OECD states. The average employment rate of women, in relation to men, amounted to 80% for Eastern Europe and 64% for developed industrial societies.

According to the authors – with whom it seems reasonable to agree – the idea of gender equality revolved around ensuring equal access to employment and equally low wages for both sexes. On the other hand, the distribution of responsibilities in the households

remained unchanged. Nevertheless, the ideology, which may be summarized by the 50s slogan, 'Women on tractors', has been an important factor facilitating the present-day legitimization of equality on the labour market. As to gender equality, socialism clearly seemed to have levelled the chances, not only for women, but for other social groups as well. During the World War II and in the fifties, a substantial part of the Polish elite was exterminated. The aftermath of this massive cleansing is a post-peasant society, which, nevertheless, could benefit from those egalitarian tendencies in social life that became more prominent shortly afterwards.

Nowadays, Polish women enjoy a relatively strong position as regards their political rights and rights to participate in public life. They gained political rights when the country recovered its independence in 1918 and, compared to other parts of the globe, their situation was fairly good. Poland is the seventh country in the world to have granted these rights to women; the aforementioned circumstances were one of the primary reasons.

Regarding the culturally conditioned position of women in Poland, the question concerning respect for women proves to be a very interesting phenomenon of which two specific examples may be enumerated. One of the examples concerns a particular cultural artefact that comprises a specific behaviour that is often adopted by Polish men in dealing with women in general. This specific behaviour pertains to hand-kissing as a form of greeting and is common in all layers of society. According to the definition by E. Shein (1984), artefacts are the most visible external manifestations of a culture and they reflect specific tendencies characteristic of a given community. In Poland, the custom of kissing women on the hand is one of such visible manifestations of socially approved behaviours that are, in this case, used to show respect for women. Yet, outward displays of respect do not necessarily entail that respect would be present on deeper levels of organizational culture described by Stein, i.e. the level of norms, values and basic assumptions. Only then would it constitute a mental barrier preventing acts of violence against women.

Another noteworthy example related to respect for women may be difficult to observe directly; however, its numerous manifestations may be perceived in the broader context of social functioning. It is related to the specifically Polish framing of the essential elements of Catholicism and, particularly, their attitude towards the figure of Mother Mary. In Poland, Holy Mary is 'forever a Virgin'; yet, the 'Virgin' is also a mother and these two facts are

widely accepted as religious axioms, with the notion of undefiled conception helping to resolve this apparent contradiction. All in all, the glorification of Mother Mary and, indirectly, other mothers is clearly noticeable in Polish society.

This is confirmed by the analysis of the so-called homosocial cultures, i.e., cultures founded on male values and the community of men (e.g. men going to war), as conducted by M. Socha (2009), reveals an important role of the mother in such cultures. This conclusion is further reinforced by the observation that 'idealized femininity' safeguards male relationships and male history (qtd. in Ostrowska, 2004). According to Socha, the mother in Polish culture is conceived as Mother Poland or Mother Homeland. The author also notes that, on the symbolic plane, the Polish soul is a woman. The country is described in terms of *Mater Polonia,* while Mother Mary – the highest ideal of motherhood – becomes the spiritual patron of the nation (p. 81). Yet another proof of the importance of these two symbols may be the Resolution of the Polish Sejm of 15 December 2016, by virtue of which the year 2017 was considered the 300th anniversary of the coronation of the painting of the Mother Mary in Czestochowa (M.P. 2017, poz. 15) .

Since 1989, Polish Mother's Memorial Hospital has operated in Poland. The history of the founding of this specialist medical unit, which deals with extremely severe maternity and childhood diseases provides an excellent illustration of how respect for women is conditioned by the homosocial culture. In 1982, when Poland strived for normalization after the imposition of martial law and during the celebration of Mother's Day, the then-operating Military Council of National Salvation proposed that a monument of Poland Mother should be built, which was approved by General Wojciech Jaruzelski, who represented the head of the national authority at the time. This monument, as Jaruzelski characterized it, was to be 'a tribute to the Polish mothers, who made a tremendous contribution to the recovery of freedom by the Homeland'. Finally, the authorities decided that the monument to commemorate Polish mothers should be a hospital dedicated to them. A public collection to finance its construction managed to raise about 530 million zloties (which amounts to about 126 million euros) during the first year alone (See: http://www.dzienniklodzki.pl/artykul/3652770, 25lecie-instytutu-centrum-zdrowia-matki-polki-w-lodzi,id,t.html).

Another issue worth considering is how the problem of culturally conditioned violence

towards women is actually perceived in Poland. In the Polish language, there exist numerous terms that condemn violence against women or express disapproval towards such acts. One example is a popular saying, 'Don't hit a woman even with a flower'. Another instance may be a negatively marked epithet, 'woman beater'. It is a contemptuous name for a man who uses his superior position or strength to verbally or physically abuse women. To sum up, in Polish culture violence against women is not and will not be treated as self-explanatory, at least not to the same extent that violence against children has long been. In the national criminal law there is no lawful justification that would exclude criminal responsibility for abusing women; yet, up to 2010 there was a justification for corporal punishment of children.

Legal Standard of Equality between Men and Women

The equality of men and women in Poland is granted by the Constitution. The provisions of the CoE Convention are based on a legitimate assumption that the main cause of violence against women and domestic violence is the unequal socio-economic status of women and men (which is also true of Poland). Its provisions aim to implement the principles of equality de jure.

The Polish Constitution, in Article 33 proclaims *expressis verbis* the equality of women and men in family, political, social and economic life. As stated in paragraph (1) of this Article: 'Men and women shall have equal rights in family, political, social and economic life in the Republic of Poland'. According to paragraph (2), 'Men and women shall have equal rights, in particular, regarding education, employment and promotion, and shall have the right to equal compensation for work of similar value, to social security, to hold offices, and to receive public honours and decorations'.

What is more, Article 32 of the same document introduces the principle of equal treatment of all citizens by the public authorities as well the principle of non-discrimination in political, social or economic life for any reason whatsoever. These two regulations are the

constitutional standard to which the ordinary and internally binding laws should be subjugated. They should regulate the operating practices of the public authorities and the patterns of social life.

Violence against Woman and Domestic Violence in Statistics

The following data, which illustrates the scale and extent of violence in Poland, has been taken from the Blue Card questionnaires dating from 2016. Consequently, it only reflects the range of situations in which the victims have broken the silence and decided to report the case to the police.

Total number of victims of violence 91 789	Total number of people suspected of violence 74 155
Number of female victims 66 930	Number of suspected women 5 461
Number of male victims 10 636	Number of suspected men 68 321
Number of underage victims 14 223	Number of suspected minors 373

Compiled on the basis of the report "Przemoc w rodzinie", retrieved from: http://statystyka.policja.pl/st/wybrane-statystyki/przemoc-w-rodzinie/50863,Przemoc-w-rodzinie.html

This report does not account for the grey zone of violence against women, that is, these occurrences of violence that have not been reported to the police. It seems unlikely; however, that the Polish statistics would differ significantly from the statistics of other

European countries. Thus, the problem appears to be complex and multifaceted.

By contrast, the following data comes from the study on the level of domestic violence in the European Union, entitled 'Violence against women: an EU wide survey' and commissioned by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights in March 2014. The results of the survey were as follows:

33% of women throughout the EU have experienced physical or sexual violence since the age of 15;

22% women have experienced physical or sexual violence by a partner;

5% of all the women surveyed have been raped. This corresponds to more than 9 million women being raped in the EU;

55% of women have experienced some form of sexual harassment. In 32% of the cases the victims indicated their colleague, boss or client as a perpetrator;

75 % of women in top management positions have experienced sexual harassment at work;

33% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence by an adult in childhood;

12% of women experienced sexual violence in childhood. Half of them indicated that the perpetrator was a man they did not know before. The most common forms of violence were exposing genitals to children or touching their genitals or breasts.

(Source: http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-vaw-survey-at-a-glance-oct14_pl.pdf)

Surprisingly, this survey is often referenced by the opponents of the Convention in order to prove that Poland is not in the worst position and even that violence against women is actually a marginal phenomenon in this country (See: http://niezalezna.pl/62633-cala-prawda-o-konwencji-antyprzemocowej-wstrzasajacy-raport-zobacz-film). One of their ways to deprecate the Convention was to claim that it only presents the acts of physical or sexual violence against girls aged 15 and less or violence against

woman perpetrated by their partners.

The survey also seems to prove that Poland, along with Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Greece, Croatia and Austria, is among the countries with the lowest levels of violence. More importantly, it claims that the highest levels of violence can be noted in Denmark, Finland and Latvia. These conclusions appear to be questionable on a number of grounds; for instance, all countries that reported relatively low violence are strongly catholic (even Spain, despite Zapatero' s secularizing reforms). It may be argued; therefore, that culturally determined standards of public expression and understanding of violence as something that is "deserved", might have significantly influenced the results.

Another reservation here may be linked to differing cultural convictions as to what words, gestures and other behaviours should be regarded as 'violence' and whether it is common to be open about it and publicly disclose such wrongdoings. Finally, one more phenomenon should be noted with regard to Poland; namely, the inferiority complex. The Poles who criticize the government in foreign press, for example, often face stigmatisation by the political forces. There exists a 'social imperative' to make a good impression on others because otherwise (perhaps due to economic reasons) Polish citizens might have thought of themselves as inferior; this may also have led the respondents to withhold certain facts.

Legal Regulations of the CoE Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence: The Practical Context of Poland.

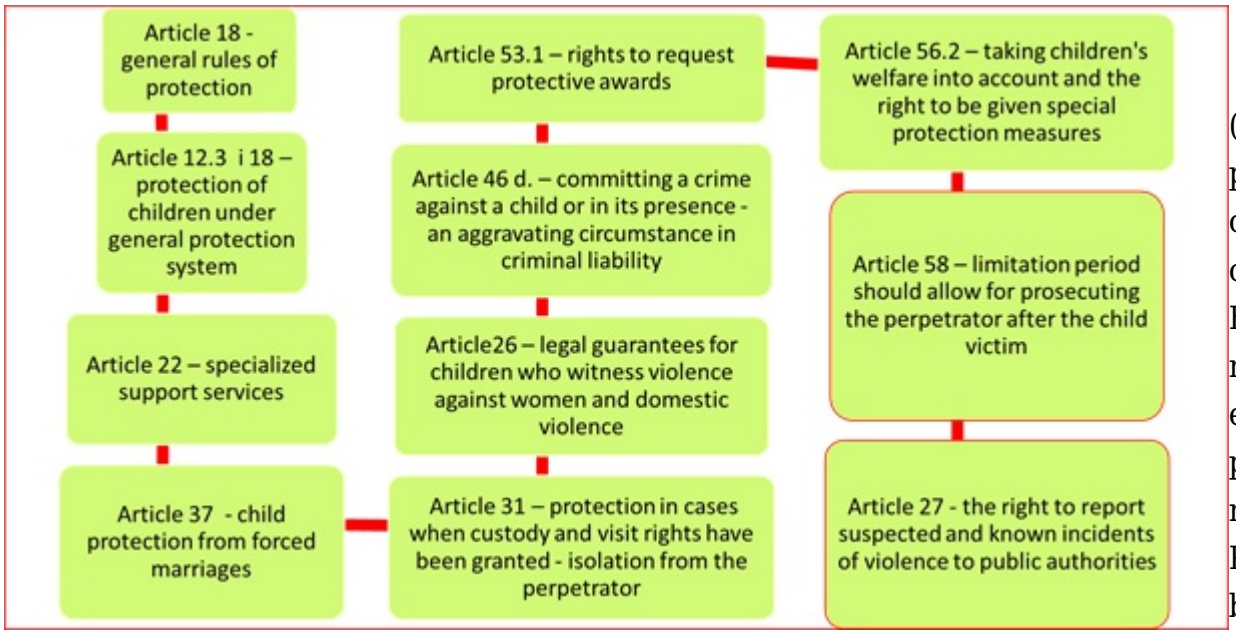
Taking into account the specific context of Poland, it might be valuable to focus on these characteristics of the Convention that are important from the point of view of preventing violence in this country.

Firstly, the Convention interprets violence against women as the violation of human rights and as a form of discrimination. The law should clearly specify that certain social groups are also entitled to human rights. In the course of history, denying some people the status of full-fledged human beings always provided a justification to use violence towards them. Therefore, the law should hinder such practices.

Secondly, the Convention combats not only the effects but also the causes of violence against women. The financial independence of women – or the lack of it – is of fundamental importance. Articles 12 and 18 of the Convention have to be interpreted in the context of recent events in Poland. Since last year, there is a child benefit programme in Poland called 500+, in which the state gives families 500 zloties a month for each second and subsequent child. It was projected that this programme will make the position of women stronger.

For this reason, the publication of the Labour force survey in Poland in 2017 brought about a heated debate about the economic consequences of the 500+ programme for women. In this debate, the main argument against the programme was that 150,000 women decided to quit their jobs between March and September 2016, Indeed, the report revealed a tendency among women in working age to withdraw from employment for personal reasons, mostly related to family and household responsibilities. Family and household duties were the main reason for the lack of professional activity in the case of 45.9% unemployed women and only 9.1% unemployed men. Other reasons for unemployment included, e.g., education and improving qualifications, sickness or disability and retirement. Withdrawal from employment as a result of receiving unemployment benefits from the state will only weaken the position of women and make them more susceptible to violence. Negative consequences of employment withdrawal by women are illustrated by the model of household decisions, proposed by N. Ott (1992, 1995) and further analyzed in the context of G. Becker's study by A.G. Dijkstra and J. Plantega. Ott's model assumes that whenever a woman chooses to withdraw from employment and to produce goods and services for the benefit of the household, her utility (welfare) decreases as does her threat point, which is a parameter correlated directly with her earning capacity. At the same time, the threat point of her (male) partner increases. The woman thus exposes herself to the risk of losing occupational opportunities and/or the depreciation of her human capital. Ott claims that one consequence of such phenomenon is the loss of women's power in the families, which will, as can easily be noted, negatively affect their decision-making powers not only in the household but also in the broader context of social life. Dijskra and Plantega add that political decisions leading to the increase in the bargaining power of men also have impact on the position of women. If a woman decides to bear a child and stay at home, her situation can be compared to a game called 'the prisoner's dilemma'. Although both partners sharing a household will benefit from this decision as the marginal utility will not be diminished; nevertheless, the female partner will still have lesser bargaining power in future negotiations.

Another positive consequence of the Convention is the introduction of regulations pertaining to the protection of children within families. The Convention forces the signatory states to adhere to high standards for the protection of children against violence. The provisions, which are presented in the figure below, establish a comprehensive protection system. This is of fundamental importance from the point of view of societal developmentm since legal instruments ensuring children's safety contribute to the development of a well-functioning society.



PICTURE 1 (The position of children: Holistic multidimensional protection. Prepared by: M. Tabernacka, on the basis of the provisions of the Convention.)

Protection of Children

Of particular significance to the Polish legal system is the commitment of the member states to the Convention to implement individual protection measures for children (adapted to the level of their emotional development) and to ensure that their best interests are served. The latter becomes even more important for these states in which the system of protecting children against violence does not have a long tradition, such as Poland.

It is thus of fundamental importance for such states that the Convention recognizes children who witness acts of domestic violence or violence against women as the victims of abuse. A key regulation that ensures the protection of children is Article 26, which requires all parties to the Convention to 'take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that in the provision of protection and support services to victims, due account is taken of the rights and needs of child witnesses of all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention. [Moreover,] Measures taken pursuant to this Article (…) include age-appropriate psychosocial counselling for child witnesses of all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention and (…) due regard to the best interests of the child'.

This regulation is supplemented by Article 56, paragraph 2, according to which a person who witness the commission of acts of violence covered by the scope of this Convention or who has reasonable grounds to believe that such an act may be committed, or that further acts of violence are to be expected, shoulkd report this to the competent organisations or authorities. A child victim and child witness of violence against women and domestic violence shall be afforded, where appropriate, special protection measures taking into account the best interests of the child. Higher standards of protection become available also by virtue of the application of the provisions of Article 46, point d., which states that whenever 'the offence was committed against or in the presence of a child, such a situation should be regarded] as aggravating circumstances in the determination of the sentence in relation to the offences established'.

In turn, Article 27 discusses the witnesses' liability to report instances of violence to appropriate authorities and organizations: 'person witness[es] to the commission of acts of violence covered by the scope of this Convention or who has reasonable grounds to believe that such an act may be committed, or that further acts of violence are to be expected, to

report this to the competent organisations or authorities.

Poland is a relatively homogeneous social area in terms of its culture and, as such, it does not have any established standards of response to problems resulting from conflicts of cultural diversity. The Convention takes the instances of such conflicts into account, which is particularly important from the perspective of children's welfare. To provide with an example, Articles 37 and 38 establish an obligation for the parties to implement provisions that would assign legal responsibility for forcing children into early marriages and for 'inciting, coercing or procuring a girl to undergo any of the acts [leading to] female genital mutilation'.

Convention as a Bargaining Chip in Political Debates in Poland

Signing and ratification of the Convention were preceded by a debate which questioned its purpose and validity; the Convention was even presented as harmful for Poland and for its culture. This debate was described in the liberal mass-media as absurd and many left wing thinkers perceived it as such. The alleged absurdity of objections raised against the Convention may denote that they were not substantive.

What is more, the signing and ratification proceedings were used by the then-opposition right wing parties to increase their political capital among the conservative minded voters, who tend to gravitate towards more 'conventional' modes of social functioning. The attachment to traditional Christian values and heterosexual family model often remain at the root of their convictions.

One should therefore expect that the main objections against the Convention were directed at the supposed promotion of homosexual values. Conservative communities claimed that the Convention contradicts the typically Polish and Christian traditions and that it may even be a threat to the current legal and systemic framework. Following are some examples of these accusations:

'The anti-violence Convention fosters violence' (See:

http://www.deon.pl/wiadomosci/polska/art,21507,konwencja-antyprzemocowa-sprzyja-przemocy.html);

For corruption, for bureaucracy, for totalitarian regimes, not to mention ideologies that may get promoted along the way, this is a rare opportunity; It tries to smuggle gender ideology into our legal system. (See: http://niepoprawni.pl/blog/miarka/konwencja-przemocowa-6-niebezpieczne-zapisy-1zapisy 1);

The Poles would lose the right to protect basic natural and Christian values, in social and private life, in families and upbringing of their children (See: http://www.deon.pl/religia/kosciol-i-swiat/z-zycia-kosciola/art,18462,rzad-ratyfikuje-kontr-konwencje-przemocowa.html);

The axiological system of the Convention, which involves social engineering actions, is not compatible with the Polish constitutional order (J. Banasiuk 2014).

What is more, the critics of the Convention saw Article 14, paragraph (1) as a threat. This paragraph states that parties to the Convention shall take, where appropriate, the necessary steps to include teaching material on issues such as equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect, non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships, gender-based violence against women and the right to personal integrity, adapted to the evolving capacity of learners, in formal curricula and at all levels of education.

Surprisingly, the biggest controversy was raised by the notion of gender itself. In this case, accusations mostly referred to Article 3 point (c.), which defines ‘gender’ as socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men. The notion of gender has been included in the Polish sociology textbooks for a couple of decades. In recent years, Polish society has become increasingly aware of the difference between the biological sex, indicated by ‘sex’, and socio-cultural sex, indicated by ‘gender’; yet, the distinction has not been questioned until recently.

Gender should be considered a normal social phenomenon. It can be noted that culturally conditioned expectations towards women are slightly different in Poland than, e.g., in Sweden or in Italy; they are defined specifically through the notion of 'gender'. In Poland; however, this notion has in recent years become a kind of modern 'witch'; a gateway to unload the frustrations of the conservative communities. As a result, the conflict that can be traced back to the division between the conservative right, actively influenced by the Catholic Church, and the progressive, pro-social left, was rekindled. In Poland, additional difficulty lies in the fact that the centre-right and the enlightened Catholic intellectual elite are not visible in the public sphere and, in debates, their voice simply disappears, which is the primary reason why the conflict is so polarized.

In December 2016, the Polish mass media informed about the alleged plans to renounce the Convention, something which had a very strong negative resonance. Its strength was further underscored by numerous social protests in November and December 2016, which were directed against political decisions limiting civil liberties. For example, the December strike was organized under the slogan, 'Polite we already have been' (e.g. http://strajkobywatelski.pl/event/strajk-obywatelski-gdansk-grzeczni-juz-bylismy/; https://pl-pl.facebook.com/events/340267749682840/)

The protests related to the plans of renouncing the Convention are a follow-up to the so-called black protests, which started in November 2016 in reaction to the attempts to tighten up the anti-abortion law. Political decisions pertaining to the Convention were thus taken in the situation in which the communities contesting the measures taken by public authorities had already been mobilised.

The Polish Ombudsman also reacted to the measures which could have resulted in renouncing the Convention. The official position of the state authorities presented to the Ombudsman by the Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment also sheds some light on the developments. In the first statement it was noted that the renunciation project, prepared by the Ministry of Justice, has been sent for inter-ministry consultations. The subsequent statement; however, noted that the project of renunciation remains unprocessed and has not been proceeded upon. What is more, it has been reported that the Government has not and does not intend to carry out any actions leading to the renunciation of the Convention.

It seems apparent that further steps to renounce the Convention would incite Polish society and the widening gap between governmental actions and societal expectations would be difficult to overcome. All the more so, since further protests were scheduled to take place on 8 March (the so-called "Women's strike"), and on the 14 February (the so-called anti-violence "dance" and part of a larger global action known as "One Billion Rising) (See: http://warszawa.ngo.pl/x/844332). The decision of the public authorities to terminate these plans should then be considered a reasonable step, in accordance with the public interest. Utilizing such a socially sensitive issue as violence against women and domestic violence for political purposes, especially by means of negating the existing legal and institutional solutions to counteract violence would not be of benefit to the society.

PICTURE 1

(Women's strike on the Wrocław market, 8 March 2017', photo by: M. Tabernacka)

The Convention and Civil Society in Poland

The validity of the Convention, its social consequences and measures taken by public authorities in relation to its introduction display a certain connection to the functioning of civil society and its institutions in Poland.

The provisions of the Convention envision a close and multidimensional cooperation with non-governmental organisations and the civil society. One example of an important regulation might be Article 9, entitled: 'Non-governmental organisations and civil society'. According to this provision, 'parties shall recognise, encourage and support, at all levels, the work of relevant non-governmental organisations and of civil society active in combating violence against women and establish effective co-operation with these organisations'. By contrast, Article 7 places non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations among the institutions which will pursue a comprehensive and coordinated anti-violence policy. More specifically, Article 7, paragraph (3) states that 'measures taken pursuant to this article shall involve, where appropriate, all relevant actors, such as government agencies, the national, regional and local parliaments and authorities, national human rights institutions and civil society organisations'. A guarantee instrument in this respect is Article 8, according to which non-governmental organizations and the institutions of civil society should be eligible to participate in funds used by the state parties to the Convention for preventing and combating domestic violence and violence against women. According to this provision, Parties shall allocate appropriate financial and human resources for the adequate implementation of integrated policies, measures and programmes to prevent and combat all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention, including those carried out by non-governmental organisations and civil society.

The system of helping the victims of domestic violence and women experiencing violence in Poland in the last 20 years has been based on the effective and active engagement of NGOs. They have acquired a well-educated staff and are recognized in their local communities. One of the most important of their initiatives is the so-called blue line (See:

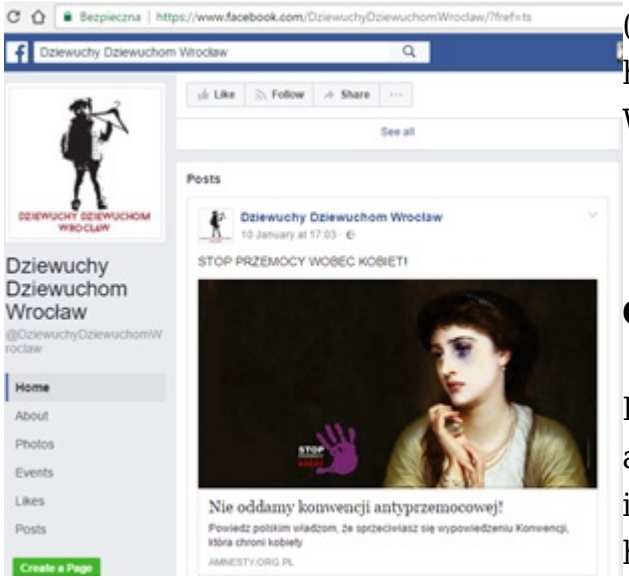
http://www.niebieskalinia.pl). As of lately, the system based on NGOs has begun to collapse as a result of the financial decisions made by the government. This is part of the problem tied to the government's way of dealing with NGOs (similar to that in Hungary). A further example could be the Centre for Women's Rights, an NGO working to ensure equal status of women and men and provide assistance for the victims of domestic violence. This organization did not receive state funding in 2016 on the grounds that its activities were devoted to helping only one social group, i.e. women. It has encountered similar financing difficulties in 2017

(cf. http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,114871,20066209,rzad-odmowil-finansowania-centrow-praw-kobiet-bo-zawezaja.html, and https://oko.press/centrum-praw-kobiet-znow-srodkow-minister-dofinansuje-caritas/).)

In Poland, in view of the fact that a significant number of non-governmental organizations does not have its own accumulated capital, their operation is dependent on subsidies from the state. Yet, since NGOs work towards the fulfilment of public service objectives, which lie in the responsibility of the State, this is only to be understood.

Measures related to the plans of renouncing the Convention had a significant influence on the mobilization of the Polish civil society institutions. It can be noted that women's grass-roots movements with significant potential began to form. One of the consequences of the mobilization of these social movements and their increasing activity is their inevitable institutionalization, which will have important influence on both social life and political conditions in Poland.

The illustration that follow provide examples of such activities. It is a website of a feminist movement called Gals4Gals. Its pejorative name is to reflect women's anger. Some of the slogans to be found on this website are: "Stop violence against women" or "Hands off the anti-violence Convention".



PICTURE 3

("Gals4Gals" – Source: https://pl-pl.facebook.com/DziewuchyDziewuchomWroclaw/)

Conclusion

It can be noted that a real consequence of the attacks on the Convention is the unification and involvement in civic activity of social circles that have until now functioned rather separately. This may have a significant bearing on the question of legitimisation of political power in Poland.

The vigorous debate around the Convention seemed so unreasonable as to raise suspicions that this could be another "substitute" topic, used to divert the public's attention from the real social, economic, and, recently, also systemic, problems. Perhaps this was indeed the case, but taking the situational context into account it appears that any measures taken to renounce the Convention should prove to be more detrimental than beneficial to the position of the Polish government. Moreover, developments concerning the plans of renouncing the Convention indicate that the government managed to retain its capacity to rationally evaluate the situation.

All things considered, the Convention is a wise document and, in the face of the current challenges for Europe, it lays out a uniform standard for dealing with violence. The latter is particularly important in the face of the crisis caused by the influx of refugees from various countries and cultures into Europe. The Convention is the foundation on which a common European framework of conduct may be developed and then adopted by individual European states, should they need to address the issues of culturally and religiously conditioned acts of violence. The culturally dependent position of women in European countries is generally similar, but fundamentally different from the position of women in Asia and Africa. The relatively high social position of women in Europe can be regarded as an essential component of the European identity. It is therefore justified to claim that the Convention

may be one of the legal instruments to protect and maintain a shared European identity.

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