

## **Alev Özkazanç**

Education and Science Workers' Trade Union-Eğitim Sen

### **“We had a strong connection”**

Hello to all, my name is Alev Özkazanç. I am retired professor of Political Sciences from Ankara University. Before retiring in 2016, I worked for the university for 25 years during which I have taught many courses for the Department of Political Science as well as Gender Studies. Meanwhile I joined KASAUM (Centre for Women's Studies) at Ankara University and participated all activities since its foundation in 1993. Together with a group of feminist academics from different faculties, we participated in several activities related to gender equality both at the university and outside of it. Alongside of my academic engagements, I joined to the Union of University Staff (ÖES) in 1994. The Union was founded at that year while I was a teaching assistant and when ÖES was terminated and joined to Eğitim-Sen (Union of Education and Science Workers) in 2001, I became a member of the new Union together with all my friends at the faculty and KASAUM.

Thus, depending on the short biographical record, I and my colleagues at KASAUM were positioned ourselves at the intersection point of two identities: both as a feminist academicians and as the members of the Union. Most of my contributions to the field of gender equality were realized from this positionality during the 1990's and early 2000's. I want to share a basic observation regarding the period to better contextualize our contribution as feminist academics. We were witnessing the massive rise of the several social movements since the 1990, the Public Employees movement were among them. Just before and after the foundation of KESK (The Confederation of Public Employees Trade Unions) in 1995, there were massive protests and strikes that I and my colleagues also joined. Thus, I can say that this massive movement covering the public employees at the Universities was exerting a huge impact on us as feminist academics. Meanwhile the women's movements were gaining ground since 1980's and had attained an important impact in the middle of 90's. Its popular support was increasing and some achievements in the legal and institutional areas were already attained. The founding of Women Studies Centres at several leading universities was a part of this institutional advancement. The Centre at Ankara University (KASAUM) was founded as the second after the Centre at İstanbul University and it became a leading centre

among all others with its varied and highly qualified academic staff. We, as the KASAUM staff were acting both as the feminist academics as well as the members of the Eđitim-Sen and KESK.

On the other hand, other unionized women at the KESK level were trying to develop relations with the independent women's movement at large and contributing to its development. The connection between KESK circles and the academic feminism was strong and KASAUM were placed at the very intersection of these two movements: KESK and the independent women's movements. Me and my colleagues at KASAUM were involved in several activities at this very intersection. Some of us directly involved in the making of gender politics and policies of KESK and made major contributions such as the establishment of Women Secretaries, relevant improvements at the Charter, planning of quota policy and the organisation of women's conferences. I was not directly involved in the macro level of gender politics but took part in many instances of gender training activities as trainer since the late 90's until 2010. These trainings were planned and organized by KASAUM and they took place in several cities, they were aimed towards the female members of KESK at all levels. These were usually two-days trainings that covered many topics such as basic concepts of gender theory and history of feminist movements as well as specific problems of feminist politics and organising at the union and KESK level. I was particularly in charge of basic trainings about the concepts of gender studies and history of feminist movement. Gender and gender equality were the main concepts driving the trainings. These trainings were very passionate and exciting for all those involved reflecting the passionate feelings of a historical moment. At this initial stages of the movement women were eager to learn and to discuss everything, there were fruitful discussions and a lively environment. Our mood was reflected and reflected the rise of the Union movement in general. And there was a rapid progress in all fronts. As I look back to these days, I clearly see the positive impact of the KASAUM and KESK connection on the positive improvements.

Yet, there were some basic failings as well. At some critical moments, I think that KESK failed grossly regarding gender politics as we witnessed at the instance of sexual harassment scandal in 2010. KESK officials and especially the women in charge of gender politics were unable to properly process the sexual harassment allegations directed at a high-level KESK administrator by a KESK employee. And this resulted in a major organisational breakdown

with many feminists being estranged along the way. As a feminists at the academia and as KESK members, it was very disappointing to witness the case for us. We were estranged from KESK for a while. Yet interestingly the sad case of sexual harassment scandal also had an unforeseen positive impact on us. By drawing on the negative lessons from KESK scandal, we were able to discuss the failings of institutional arrangements regarding the sexual harassment policies both at KESK and at the University. As a result, we finally managed to issue a sexual harassment policy for Ankara University in 2012. We founded the CTS (Unit for Combatting Sexual Violence and Harassment) and I was actively involved both in the writing of the policy statement and at the functioning of the Unit.

In general, and overall, I can say that the interaction between KASAUM and KESK started and worked out against all difficulties and setbacks. It has been a very inspiring and thought-provoking process for us all and it is continuing to this day. At this stage, it is important to look back at that historical moment to draw more lessons for the future. That's why I think this project of oral history undertaken by our KESK friend is very valuable and I am glad to take part in it. Thank you.