

Abstract for an Invited Paper
for the MAR08 Meeting of
The American Physical Society

Marshak Lectureship Talk: Women in Physics in the Baltic States Region: Problems and Solutions

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In this contribution the gender equality problem in physics will be discussed on the basis of the results obtained implementing the project “Baltic States Network: Women in Sciences and High Technology” (BASNET) initiated by Lithuanian women physicists and financed by European Commission. The main goal of BASNET project was creation of the regional Strategy how to deal with women in sciences problem in the Baltic States. It has some stages and the contribution follows them. The first one was in depth sociological study aiming to find out disincentives and barriers women scientists face in their career and work at science and higher education institutions. Analysis of results revealed wide range of problems concerned with science organization, management and financing common for both counterparts. However it also proved the existence of women discrimination in sciences. As main factors influencing women under-representation in Physics was found: the stereotypes existing in the society where physics is assigned to the masculine area of activity; failings of the science management system, where highest positions are distributed not using the institutionalized objective criteria but by voting, where the correctness of majority solutions is anticipated implicitly. In physics where male scientists are the majority (they also usually compose executive boards, committees etc.) results of such a procedures often are unfavorable for women. The same reasons also influence women “visibility” in physicist’s community and as the consequence possibility to receive needed recourses for their research as well as appropriate presentation of results obtained. The study revealed also the conservatism of scientific community- reluctance to face existing in the scientific society problems and to start solving them. On the basis of the results obtained as well practice of other countries the common strategy of solving women in physics (sciences) in the Baltic States region was formulated. As changing the stereotypes is long lasting process it was decided firstly to concentrate strategy implementation plans on changes in science management policy tackling the problem from the top and allowing receive the most quick results. For this we created the regional Baltic States Network among the corresponding international women working groups, professional organizations (Scientific societies) and corresponding departments of the governmental institutions. BASNET also became a full member of European Platform of Women Scientists (EPWS)-prestige women organization signally influencing the European Community science policy.