



## Populist right, far right and gender in Europe 5, April 2017

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**A conference organized by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, in co-operation with the Departments of Political Science and Gender Studies at the Central European University (CEU)**

The goal of the conference was to discuss how the consideration of the gender dimension can contribute to a deeper understanding of right-wing populism and the rise of illiberal democracies.

The conference was opened by **Jan Niklas ENGELS, director of FES Budapest**. He expressed FES' solidarity with CEU and the freedom of thought. He stressed how structural inequalities, identity politics and gender were related issues and suggested that we should look beyond symptoms and ask ourselves: is what we had proposed enough or are new answers needed? Engels also quoted [an article](#) of **Eszter KOVÁTS (FES) and Professor Andrea PETŐ**, which among other things stood up for the re-politicization of equality issues instead of using the policy, human rights or identity politics languages that rendered issues apolitical.

**Professor Zsolt ENYEDI, Pro-Rector for Hungarian Affairs at CEU** noted that the relationship between gender and politics was complex and perplexing and – referring to the CEU – noted that this was the right time and place to think about these issues. **Elissa HELMS, the Head of Department of Gender Studies at CEU**, underlined that some students of CEU were present in the panels and stressed the importance of intersectionality.

Both panels were moderated by Professor Andrea PETŐ of CEU. In her introduction, she picked out three important questions to which answers were needed: how and why gender acts as a symbolic glue, what are the challenges for progressive political actors, and how is the re-enchantment of progressive politics possible?

The first speaker of the first panel was **Carina KLAMMER, a PhD student of the University of Vienna**, talking about the case of FPÖ in Austria. Research has paid little attention to gender in the case of FPÖ, she said. However, right-wing extremism usually tends to believe in a difference between people based on nature, which has a strong effect on gender relations. The latter are strictly binary, meaning mutually opposing identities and characteristics. The reproduction of the nation is also important. In this context, Muslim women are considered by the far right as demographical weapons against Western society. That is why right-wing extremism can be strongly anti-immigrant, but at the same time liberal towards homosexuality, she argued. While right-wing extremism is often considered as dominated by men, FPÖ led women to important positions. This was part of a political strategy, a gamble on stereotypes that suggest modernity and friendliness.

The second speaker was **Valérie DUBSLAFF, a PhD student from the University Paris-Sorbonne**. She noted that the leadership of the Front National (FN) was a political dynasty. In 2011, Marine Le

Pen became party leader because her father wanted to keep his influence. Marine Le Pen is a modern divorced woman, a mother and a lawyer who describes herself as a feminist who defends women's rights mostly against Islam. In 2015, she excluded her father from the party. Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, daughter of Marine Le Pen, represents another concept of gender relations in the FN, she is a heiress of Jean-Marie Le Pen, popular and young, close to catholic fundamentalism and to the identitarian movement. Through the new style of political messages of Marine Le Pen electoral behavior has changed, the FN became less masculine without repelling male voters. The gender gap is thus shrinking.

The third speaker of this panel was **Juliane LANG**, discussing the rise of the AfD in Germany: Although the AfD has a woman leader, it is against gender studies and affirmative action. In the discourse, there is a reversal of power relations (ex.: powerful feminists). Masculinity and femininity are not social constructs, but traditional roles. Lang argued that AfD arguments were often shadowboxing: in reality, she said, nobody wants privileges attributed to minorities. The voters of AfD are both men and women, electoral choice is explained mostly by the anti-migrant stance of the party.

**Marta ZIMNIAK-HAŁAJKO**, a social movement researcher from the University of Warsaw spoke fourth. The keyword of her presentation was social productivity, a moment when new types of practices or discourses meet the needs of people. She suggested that Polish feminism and neoliberal dogmatic rule were not able to address all these needs, leaving space for conservative movements. She presented two examples of this social productivity, one of which was the report of the conservative anti-abortion legal group Ordo Iuris Institute that currently serves as a white paper and a roadmap for the PiS government in terms of family policy. The second example was another proposal of the Ordo Iuris Institute and its partners that would have completely banned abortion in Poland, as part of a "pro-life" package that discussed the social cost and organization of care for disabled people. The proposal redirected discourse from bioethics to social issues, she argued. Zimniak-Hałajko also suggested that the child benefit program of the current government will contribute to the reduction of poverty of large families, while its demographic results might be off target.

Fifth, **Alena KLUKNAVSKÁ** from the Masaryk University in Brno analyzed the situation in Slovakia, presented the most important extreme right-wing actors (SNS, LSNS) and made two main points about how gender is referenced in their discourses and how messages about women are constructed to legitimate nativist goals. Gender issues are not central in these ideologies, that are conservative, traditionalist and paternalistic and tend to fight „liberal destruction“, which is considered as a nativist threat against the nation. These parties opt for traditional gender roles, and support the ban on same sex marriage (manifested in the so-called „referendum on family“, February 2015). The public participation of women, Kluknavská argued, is linked to traditional gender roles („glorified mothers“).

**Anikó Félix**, a sociologist from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and ELTE closed this panel. She noted that for Jobbik (Movement for a Better Hungary), gender issues were not to be considered as a symbolic glue, that is, a symbolic point of contention for those who fear or fight globalization

and its consequences. She analyzed six points usually discussed in relation to anti-gender movements, including LGBT-rights, the Istanbul Convention and other international treaties, gender mainstreaming and other gender policies, sexual education and gender studies, and the critique of international organizations and institutions. She noted that the discourse of Jobbik became ambivalent or softer in the case of LGBT-rights, international treaties and gender policy, but this softening also includes a certain dose of double speech.

In the discussion part of the panel, one questioner wanted to know what the difference between conservatives and far right (i.e. Fidesz-Jobbik, FPÖ-ÖVP) was. Carina Klammer responded that there were similarities and differences, the differences being that conservatives seldom share conspiracy theories or irrational thinking. Juliane Lang said that in Germany the main difference was in the voter base. AfD reaches out to the lower classes and previous non-voters. Anikó Félix explained that in Hungary Jobbik tried to show its opposition to the government, therefore ideology comes second.

A member of the audience raised the question of care, while Elissa Helms asked a question about the problem of nationalism. Carina Klammer responded that nationalism was at the core of her definition and that the FPÖ was active with women's shelters. In government, though, the party is often neoliberal. Valérie Dubslaff also noted that nationalism was important but a seldom used word (national priority and sovereignty, patriotism are more present in discourse). According to Juliane Lang, the AfD does not call itself nationalist and does not really talk about it. Alena Kluknavská also noted that nationalism was at the core of discourse and that radical parties did not care about care. In Hungary, explained Anikó Félix, nationalism was also at the core of populist right ideology ("over-reproduction" of the Roma, then migrants). The care issue is an angle of attack against the government. With this, the first panel was closed.

As Andrea Pető explained, the goal of the second panel was to think about political implications. Participants delivered statements in alphabetical order, before Pető opened the discussion.

**Tamás BOROS, director of the think tank Policy Solutions** suggested that traditional left-right cleavages were about to change or disappear in many member states, while Germany might be an exception. Economic cleavages, he said, still exist, but they are not exclusive anymore. Political space has become at least threefold. In South-Europe (what he called) the populist left has risen instead of the populist right. 30% of EU citizens vote for parties that are against the liberal democratic consensus. Mainstream parties have lived in a marriage for decades and became similar to each other – as spouses do. When cleavages are about identities, he stressed, political debates are similar to wars. While in Western Europe populist parties are past their peak of support, Eastern Europe delivers another story.

**Anikó GREGOR, PhD, a CEU Alumna and researcher at ELTE** raised the concept of neoliberal neopatriarchy of Beatrix Campbell, where social, health care, etc. services – not rendered – by the state are accompanied by a discourse strengthening traditional gender roles. „Private” care work is mostly performed by women. The right-wing critique of neoliberalism can be anti-EU or even antisemitic, and might offer emancipation routes to women within neopatriarchy. While the far

right moves to the center, intellectual space opens up at the extremes, she added. Meanwhile, the left toddles around and suffers from the label of left-liberalism. Structural inequalities are rarely addressed, identity politics is at the center of political action. Gender issues are not raised as part of structural inequalities (the program of László Botka, PM candidate of the Hungarian Socialist Party, is unknown from this point of view, she argued).

**Bulcsú HUNYADI from the think tank Political Capital** agreed that there was a crisis of traditional cleavages. He noted, however, that such changes happened before, for example when the Greens appeared in European politics. Now globalization is at the heart of the matter, and as the situation is complex, citizens are in a difficult place. Developments are often out of the national framework. He agreed that gender was indeed a symbolic glue and suggested that it was going to be a main issue of the liberal – illiberal battle. On the other hand, anti-immigration discourses are also important. He raised the concept of equal rights chauvinism in parallel with welfare chauvinism.

**Edit INOTAI, fellow at the Centre for Euro-Atlantic Integration and Democracy,** former journalist explained a journalistic inquiry they did on female right-wing radical political leaders (Norway, Denmark etc.). She noted that there was a female politician generation in these parties. Ambition and anti-immigration opinions accompany their careers, and most probably they render masculine parties electable. This is mostly clear in the case of Marine Le Pen. This phenomenon makes it harder for political opponents to demonize these parties. The inquiry suggested that these women believed in traditional gender roles and have careers – that is, they want women to have children. When they support women's rights or LGBT rights, they do so against Islam. The left cannot really address these issues in this context.

**Zoltán LAKNER, vice editor-in-chief of the weekly 168 Óra** suggested that we were part of an experiment where actors talked about things that were hidden and that were never in a governmental position before. He then analyzed the special Hungarian case noting that there was welfare chauvinism in the country, yet welfare was lacking. The role of identity politics is to hide social inequalities – and gender is part of this. However, the actual social policy is more progressive than the discourse. Toddling, when it comes to left wing politics, is a telling word, he added. It is a question whether the left has a message in terms of class relations and inequalities. The lack of influential female politicians is also a problem.

**András STUMPF, journalist of the weekly Heti Válasz** argued that reality bypassed the presuppositions of liberal progressives who argue in terms of ideological categories instead of working with reality. People feel and face material problems and are quite rational. The categories used by progressives are in turn ideological (trumpisation, lepenisation, racism, homophobia, extremism). The left should rather spend time with things like workers, instead of the inflation of the number of genders or gender neutral toilets and should dissociate itself from its own progressive radicalism. The economic crisis of 2008 has also played a role in the strengthening of populism. When there is a crisis, a pictogram debate becomes downright ridiculous, he argued.

**Zsolt ENYEDI** wished to bring up the electoral sociology angle: at the beginning of the 20th century, the left was at the forefront of the fight for women's right to vote. When it was obtained,

women began to vote for the right. Things became more balanced by the 60s. When polarization started to focus on cultural issues, women navigated towards the left. The new left focuses more on women than the redefined right. Parties begin to shift discourse again, for example to talk about women's rights in the context of Islam. Enyedi argued that the change was real, not a mere PR stunt. The political space is changing. The left can no longer take women's votes for granted.

During the discussion part of the panel, András Stumpf criticized that the name of Krisztina Morvai, a female MEP of Jobbik, a self-declared feminist has not been mentioned as well as the Dúró-Novák family, a well-known radical right-wing couple of politicians that tend to openly talk about their harmonious and progressive family life. Anikó Gregor didn't agree with the East-West divide suggested by Boros, and insisted that both East and West are part of the same system of global inequalities that is often analyzed only by the far right. Tamás Boros elaborated on his marriage metaphor by saying that the left softened its stance on economic issues, the right softened its stance on cultural issues to make the marriage work. Social expectations changed slower than the political elite, he added. Zoltán Lakner argued as an answer to András Stumpf that identity and its personal protection was also part of reality. Anikó Gregor brought up the issue of care, noting that populism often framed their politics as care for the nation. Framing is very important in the case of populism, for example in the case of migration (protecting women from migration etc.). András Stumpf said that there is an inconsistency in the care discourse (female politicians interiorize male dominance, but care on behalf of a male politician is also a problem). Politicians become politicians to care for the community. Bulcsú Hunyadi argued that granting equal rights to people do not harm anyone, yet conservatives often feel that their culture is being attacked, he argued. Tamás Boros said that equality was a "learned value" and when a progressive wanted to convince a conservative, they should refer to concurrent conservative values. Anikó Gregor argued that dignity was also a question of material inequality, the identity politics framework alone cannot work.

**Anikó FÉLIX reflected** on the question of Krisztina Morvai's feminism, by saying that it was a limited feminism focusing on violence against women. She also added that right-wing populism opened up new emancipation routes for women. A spectator asked a question about Hungarian women's electoral behavior.

In response, Tamás Boros argued that indeed Hungarian women tend to vote conservative. Even two or three years ago, most Budapest respondents were of the opinion that when a woman had to choose between family and career, she should go for the family. Anikó Gregor argued that the economic framework, inequalities and uncertainties kind of forced women to opt for traditional gender roles. András Stumpf argued that it was the right that gave up more of its values, now the gap is being filled up by populists. Hunyadi noted that the political sphere was about to shift to the right now. He also added that populism, for him, is not about asking questions but about giving certain types of responses. Edit Inotai analyzed the relationship between Western and Eastern wages from an economic point of view.