

GENDER MATTERS!

ANTIFEMINISM

Newsletter on gender activities by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung – No. 6

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FOCUS

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EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

We are pleased to present a selection of texts from our current issue of 'Gender matters!', the gender policy info-letter published by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES). These texts – which represent a diversity of international perspectives on gender-related issues – have been translated into English for this publication.

The sixth edition of 'Gender matters!' FOCUSes on antifeminist developments. A strong front against gender equality is on the rise in Europe. Heide Oestreich's article 'Against the "Culture of Death": Antifeminism in Europe' provides an overview of the European developments and actors in this area. Andrea Pető, Professor at the Central European University in Budapest, addresses the European anti-gender movement in her text, "'Anti-gender" Mobilisational Discourse of Conservative and Far Right Parties as a Challenge for Progressive Politics'. Pető's text, which was originally published in the anthology 'Gender as symbolic glue', also examines the forms that antifeminism counter-strategies can take.

In addition, there is a REVIEW of gender-themed work by the FES in recent months, as well as our gender-related review of PUBLICATIONS.

We are currently addressing the question of how 'Gender matters!' should be presented in the future. In the spring, many of our readers took part in a survey that invited suggestions and wishes. Thank you very much for your participation! In the coming weeks, we will discuss the results of this survey and look forward to presenting you with these results in the near future!

I wish you an interesting read,

Sarah Vespermann

FES Department for Politics and Society



*Beatrix von Storch represents the right-wing populist AfD in the European Parliament.
Photo: picture-alliance*

AGAINST THE 'CULTURE OF DEATH': ANTIFEMINISM IN EUROPE

In Poland, 178 kindergartens already bear the anti-gender certificate, which means that gender norms will not be challenged. Slovakian bishops refer to gender theory as the 'culture of death'.

In Slovakia, 80 per cent of those taking part in a referendum oppose homosexual marriage and the right of adoption for homosexuals. In Poland, a parliamentary 'stop gender ideology' committee has been formed. In France, following massive pressure from the anti-gender front, the government has withdrawn a programme to provide gender equality for men and women. Moreover, the European Parliament can suddenly no longer agree that abortion should remain unpunished.

What sounds like dystopian novel is reality today in Europe. Forces exist that want a rollback in social gains, and they are becoming stronger and more influential. What does this European anti-gender front look like?

The Anti-Gender Front

According to Andreas Kemper, the anti-gender front is supported by Christian fundamentalists. In his expert assessment 'Foundation of the Nation – Part 2' (<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/dialog/12503.pdf>) for the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Kemper points out that fundamental Christians see themselves justified in strengthening their extra-ecclesiastical activity, since John Paul II appealed for a new evangelisation in a Europe weary of faith. Benedict XVI spearheaded this development with the establishment of the 'Pontifical Council for the Promotion of a New Evangelisation'. This has encouraged conservative actors, – such as the publicist Birgit Kelle and Beatrix von Storch, a member of the European Parliament for the party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) –, to expand their efforts in an extra-ecclesiastical direction by exercising influence via civil society organisations.

These organisations have been established in all European countries. They have names such as 'CARE for Europe' (Christian Action Research and Education) or 'New Women for Europe' (Birgit Kelle is member of the Board of Directors). They also launch initiatives, such as the European citizens' initiative 'One of Us' (co-organised by Beatrix von Storch and Hedwig von Beverfoerde), whose platform includes halting development aid to organisations that support abortion. A total of 1.74 million signatures have already been obtained in support. The EU Commission, however, has rejected the implementation of this scheme.

The so-called protection of life is one of the recurrent themes of the anti-gender movement. Two other themes are also strongly anchored in fundamentalist Christian demands. The first is the opposition to homosexuality. In practical terms, this primarily means combating 'homosexual marriage' and the right of adoption, as well as the presentation of homosexuality in school education. 'Early sexualisation' and 'hyper-sexualisation' are typical of the catchy phrases used by the populists. The second theme is the glorification of heterosexual marriage and family – thus the rejection of any doubt with regard to traditional gender roles. The phrases 'imminent re-education' and 'gender ideology' are omnipresent.

Andreas Kemper refers to this range of themes with a regressive, strongly normatively charged family image as 'familialism': back to the conservative family. This also means back to a model of inequality between men and women – who should go back into the kitchen – and between the majority and minority. Kemper does not regard it as a coincidence that the activists von Storch and von Beverfoerde – two aristocratic names – are at the forefront of these movements. Here it is a matter of re-establishing the 'Catholic hierarchy' and giving it priority over human rights as well as freedom and equality.

This conservative familialism, emerging as a reaction to the (perceived) breakdown of social relationships in Western Europe, is also flourishing in the former Eastern Bloc countries, where the decay of such relationships is experienced in fast-forward modus. Thus the Russian President Vladimir Putin, who pressed ahead with a law against 'homosexual propaganda', praised these endeavours and, in turn, is admired by Marine Le Pen, chairman of the Front National. 'With Putin, we can save the Christian civilisation', she stated in 2014.

Whereas the feeling is fostered in the West that the European Union (EU) has gone 'too far' in its vision of gender equality and the recognition of human rights for homosexuals – for example, in their right to marriage and family – in the East, in contrast, it is often emphasised that the EU intends to impose on these countries something that is alien to their nature. This is a mild difference in the rhetoric, but hardly in substance.

Two Examples: France and Slovakia

Eszter Kováts, who is responsible for the project 'Gender Equality in East-Central Europe' for the FES in Budapest, and Maari Põim from the 'Foundation of European Progressive Studies' (FEPS) have compiled several country studies in their anthology entitled 'Gender as symbolic glue' (<http://bit.ly/1VQY5dT>). The following text considers in detail two examples taken from the anthology: one from Western Europe and one from Eastern Europe.

In **France**, opposition to the 'idéologie de genre' (gender ideology) centred on the conservative movement that was unleashed against 'homosexual marriage' promised by President François Hollande in his election campaign in 2011. This was intended to be a continuation of the hitherto 'marriage light' of the 'pacte civil de solidarité' (PACS, civil solidarity pact) to allow homosexual couples – amongst other things – to adopt children. At the zenith of the conservative movement, up to 800,000 people who could not imagine that homosexuals would make good parents, took to the streets.

The movement was led by Catholic intellectuals, who had previously attempted to organise opposition to sexual education in schoolbooks – albeit without significant results. They were more successful with homophobia. They presented both 'homosexual marriage' and gender theory, which they claimed to be based on the 'changeability of gender roles', as a threat to the family, as described by Gaël Brustier in his contribution to 'Gender as symbolic glue'.

Political parties reacted differently to this movement. Nicolas Sarkozy, leader of the conservative UMP, wanted to address right-wing Catholics, although only a few years earlier, he had introduced EU-compliant measures in the fight against gender stereotypes: in 2011, the concept of gender was incorporated into the school curriculum – an 'ABCD of equality' was intended to be a programme to help to break down stereotypes.

Following the homophobic and genderphobic marches, the UMP – no longer the governing party – suddenly came out against the integration of gender theory in schoolbooks. In 2013, after the major homophobic parades, the party even filed a complaint against the law opening up marriage, which had already been adopted by the National Assembly. The



*The comedian Frigide Barjot supporting the French demonstration 'La Manif Pour Tous', which opposes marriage for everybody. Diversity is not welcome!
Photo: picture-alliance*

appeal was rejected, and the first same-sex marriage took place in Montpellier at the end of March 2013.

The Front National under Marine Le Pen is split on the issue. It had originally associated itself with the Dutch 'Wilders Model', which is intended to protect women and homosexuals from 'Islam'. This is poorly suited to the demand for fewer rights for homosexuals and women, whom the party had identified as a possible target group for the purpose of gaining votes among middle-class voters. For this reason, there is nothing in the party programme on this issue, merely comments against the 'idéologie du genre' made by individual representatives.

Nevertheless, the conservative demonstration influenced the Socialist government under François Hollande, who – amongst other things – withdrew the 'ABCD of equality', allegedly to revise it. Since then, nothing more has been heard on the subject.

The anthology by Kováts and Põim also explores the counter-strategies that might be used by the progressive forces. Brustier demands setting common sense and public spirit against conservative values, as well as discussing distribution and power issues. According to Brustier, the most important thing is to polarise and send a clear message. He does not currently see this in France.

In **Slovakia**, the anti-gender protest was also sparked by a politically controversial issue: in 2014, fundamentalist Christians and right-wing groups collected enough signatures for a referendum. The themes were marriage as a unique union between men and women, a ban on adoption for homosexuals, as well as the right of school pupils not to attend sexual education lessons. All conservative parties gave their support. Unlike in France, there were no right-wing parties that considered it necessary to take account of homosexual electorate.

As in other countries, the movement in Slovakia began with right-wing Catholic. In a pastoral letter issued in 2013, the bishops referred to the elimination of gender boundaries as a path leading to the fragmentation of society. The gender 'ideology' was labelled an integral component of a 'culture of death'. In the letter, it was claimed that representatives of this 'culture of death' no longer wanted men to feel like men or women to feel like women, which is why they supported same-sex marriage.

In her contribution to 'Gender as symbolic glue', Petra Ďurinová wrote that shortly after the pastoral letter was issued, a church-friendly 'alliance for the family' was formed. Its aim was the above-mentioned referendum on the issue of 'family protection'. The conservative parties again took up this issue. They locked their voters with the promise of propagating the 'healthy family' as a fundamental requirement for the solution to the 'moral crisis' in society. Marriage as a community of a man and a woman is laid down in diverse party manifestos. The referendum took place on 7 February 2015 and 80 per cent of those taking part voted for 'family protection'. However, the result of the referendum was not valid, since the 50 per cent turnout of the electorate required was not achieved – only about 20 per cent actually voted.

The demands of the EU were perceived in Slovakia as conditions alien to their culture – much more clearly than in Western European countries. Thus, Jan Figel, leader of the oppositional Christian-Democratic KDH, disqualified the EU's human rights strategy as being 'inspired by gender ideology'. This party promises its voters that it will either not implement these obligations or renegotiate them. Although the ruling Social Democratic Party had been working on the implementation of human rights plans for three years, due to the massive social and political opposition they did not succeed in implementing the strategy in terms of legal measures. Instead, it is now referred to as a non-binding 'framework strategy'.

The homophobes, in contrast, succeeded in having a new clause included in the constitutional article concerning the protection of marriage: 'Marriage is a unique partnership between a man and a woman'.

The only opposition to the anti-gender discourse came from the science community. The Gender Equality Institute thereupon developed an e-learning course aimed at state officials, students, and the public. However, participation in this course assumes a special interest. Overall, as Ďurinová sums up, there is a lack of dialogue on the issue of 'gender' and the benefits to be obtained from the elimination of gender stereotypes. Furthermore, there is an absence of networking between the individual initiatives; support from the EU is urgently needed.

A Pan-European Movement, Pan-European Opposition?

The FES dialogue programme has provided a further overview of anti-gender activities. For example, at the major conference 'Gender Ideology – Mobilisation against gender equality and sexual rights in Europe', held in Brussels from 15 – 17 November 2015, anti-gender strategies in 14 EU countries were discussed and debated.

The political scientists David Paternotte and Roman Kuhar warned against persisting with national perspectives, stating that the anti-gender movement has not grown in each country for nationally explainable reasons, thus it is necessary to perceive and thematise the Europe-wide context. After all, the anti-gender movement would definitely exchange views on an international basis – via arguments, logos, and actions, etc. – if, for example, the French 'La Manif pour tous' is exported to Italy and the German 'Demo für alle' (demonstration for everybody) serves as a model.

It is even more important to consider the global perspective. The origin of the conservative gender point of view is to be found in the Catholic Church, the 'oldest political actor' on the global stage. Back in the 1990s, the Church agitated against the World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), and since then has rejected the concept of gender mainstreaming developed in Beijing. Furthermore, pro-lifers have adopted methods practised by the Christian pro-life movement in the US. And finally, these discourses in the Latin American, African, and Arab countries are associated with an anti-colonial discourse, which denounces human – and especially

women's – rights as a Western post-colonial discourse of power. The special feature in Europe is that the formation of trans-European movements, in the full sense of the word, as the 'transport' of real people is possible today in a very short time. Activists inspire lively travel activity, thus connecting groups in the individual countries. In addition, the anti-gender front also takes advantage of the EU's supranational structures for their campaigns.

Gabriele Kuby – a conservative, catholic German sociologist – is a welcome guest in Eastern European countries. The French comedian with the stage name 'Frigide Barjot', who spearheaded the demonstrations against 'homosexual marriage' in France, went on a veritable tour through Europe. Other activists are invited by the Moscow patriarchy and financed at a higher level: for example, a Russian bank supported Marine Le Pen's election campaign in France, which she duly acknowledged with regular declarations of loyalty in Moscow's direction. Books and documents are promptly translated, while the above-mentioned Slovakian pastoral letter also found its way to Hungary and Slovenia. Activism is also becoming transnational: in 2014 for the first time, the French 'La Manif pour tous' movement stimulated a Europe-wide demonstration, which led to smaller co-demonstrations in various countries.

Against this background of increasing activities by genderphobics, the associations and organisations dedicated to the progress of gender equality view the official behaviour of the EU with concern. To date, the EU has not undertaken any major efforts to further develop the gender equality strategy that expired in 2015. A successor programme for the next five years is long overdue, but nothing has happened.

According to the political scientist Irene Pimminger – in her FES report 'A Quiet Farewell' (<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/12040.pdf>) on current developments in the EU's gender equality policy – the golden age of the EU's gender policy is over. Thus gender equality is not even included as an independent objective in the new EU strategy up to 2020. In November 2015 at the FES Conference „Es steht viel auf dem Spiel – Wohin geht die europäische Gleichstellungspolitik nach 2015?“ ('There is much at stake – What direction is the European Gender Equality policy taking after 2015?'), representatives from civil society and politics warned against the lapsing of the gender equality strategy.

At the FES Conference 'The future of EU gender equality policies – What's next?', held in Brussels during the same month, Maria Noichl (a European member of Parliament) presented an initiative report on the matter. In her opinion, the integration of men into gender equality policy should become an issue. The reconcilability of career and family as an issue has also made an impression on fathers. There can hardly be any further progress for women without participation by fathers – both in raising children and with housework. In addition, growing domestic violence should be prioritised.

The pressure applied had a small effect: the competent Commissioner of Justice, Vera Jourová, presented a staff working paper. However, this paper did not offer any new approaches, but merely a plan to continue the old projects. This was greeted with little enthusiasm by critics, who complained that the paper was hardly binding. 'This is a fatal sign for European gender equality policy', commented Kristin Linke of the FES.

If genderphobics continue to achieve further successes that result in gender issues becoming discredited, this could affect the classic areas of labour market policy and anti-violence work. Their propaganda would then encounter an area that has been neglected by the EU Commission. This would not only result in a standstill in the gender equality policy, but also signify a dangerous step backwards.

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*In 'Gender as symbolic glue', Andrea Pető looks at anti-gender movements in Europe.
Photo: CEU/Daniel Vogel*

ANTI-GENDER MOVEMENTS IN EUROPE – WHAT TO DO ABOUT THEM?

From the anthology 'Gender as symbolic glue'.
Andrea Pető, Professor at the Central European
University in Budapest, addresses anti-gender
movement in Europe.

Extended version of Pető's epilogue. Edited by Heide Oestreich (author 'Gender matters!') and Eszter Kováts (FES Hungary):

A spectre is haunting Europe, haunting gender equality experts, activists, politicians, and scientists alike: anti-gender movements. From Paris to Slovakia, tens of thousands are taking to the streets to demonstrate against the legalisation of 'homosexual marriage', signing manifests against sexual education, and aiming to remove the word 'gender' from school curricula. For the first time since 1945, the consensus on our European values is being challenged – high time, therefore, to develop counter-strategies. Progressive forces have to critically reconsider the neo-liberal emancipation concept and attempt to 're-enchant' feminist action in the spirit of Max Weber. Only in this manner, can it be made more attractive for a wider public, instead of making others responsible when misunderstandings occur or – even worse – repeatedly explaining 'what gender really is' (Pető 2015a, Pető 2015b).

What Is It that Makes the Movements so relevant?

Anti-gender movements are opening up new ground in Europe's political, cultural, and social landscape and challenging previous lines of conflict. On the one hand, the prestige enjoyed by democratic politics is dwindling: voter turnout is falling and established parties are lacking wide public support. On the other hand, the number of people engaged in secular, human rights-based women's organisations remains more or less constant. While progressive movements are not increasing in size, anti-gender movements seem to have no problem with lack of participation.

The result is an identity rhetoric outside the framework of universal human rights, in which gender issues had hitherto found a comfortable space. At first glance, however, it only seems that these organisations are 'anti-gender', because they attack something that they call 'the gender ideology'. In fact, a deeper analysis in five European countries – Hungary, France, Germany, Poland, and Slovakia – reveals that their arguments provide an alternative to established thinking patterns (Kováts and Põim 2015: Gender as symbolic glue). 'Gender' only serves as a kind of symbolic glue.

How progressive forces should evaluate this new political, participative, social, and cultural development remains an open question – as does the issue of the movements' influence on conservative parties, which are indeed themselves a product of the European consensus on human rights.

While at first glance, protagonists of anti-gender movements appear to solely attack gender politics, much more is hidden behind this façade: a disavowing of European politics and our system of values, as well as the desire to discard liberal democracy. This has only now become possible, because the promise of gender equality has either been broken (in the 'new Europe') or has resulted in premature and rather superficial changes (in the 'old Europe').

Anti-gender movements are global phenomena. Their appeal is based on the fact that international human rights conventions are increasingly being challenged in several nation states. Arguments relating to 'cultural exceptions', which allegedly need to be created, are often used. For example, several African countries have criticised aid programmes that are intended to ensure women's reproductive rights. These programmes were criticised for forcing a 'gender ideology' on the countries, to which they were expected to react in the spirit of the anti-colonial freedom struggle.

Progressive politicians who want to understand this new political development must find a new conceptual framework. Anti-gender movements do not possess a utopia, nor do they want gender equality in the near future. Instead, they promise rapid transition according to their own ideas. In essence, these movements are successful because they build on the fundamental weakness inherent in the progressive forces, which, in turn, had promised a fast transition in the globalised world (Pető and Vasali 2014).

Reactions

Progressive, human rights-based, and secular women's movements have reacted to the growing prominence of anti-gender movements in an overwhelmingly defensive manner. Research and politics are now beginning to understand this development and devise counter-strategies. In 2006, an article by Volker Zastrow appeared in the conservative German newspaper, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, criticising something he considers 'gender'. Thus it seems as if the line between conservative and right-wing publications have become increasingly blurred, and the arguments set forth in the publications interchangeable. It has only been in the last two (!) years that progressive forces have noticed that they have been pushed into a corner, and it is proving extremely difficult for them to manoeuvre themselves out of it (Heinrich Böll Foundation 2015). Anti-gender movements are fighting for control – a hegemonic struggle in the spirit of Gramsci; for this is what

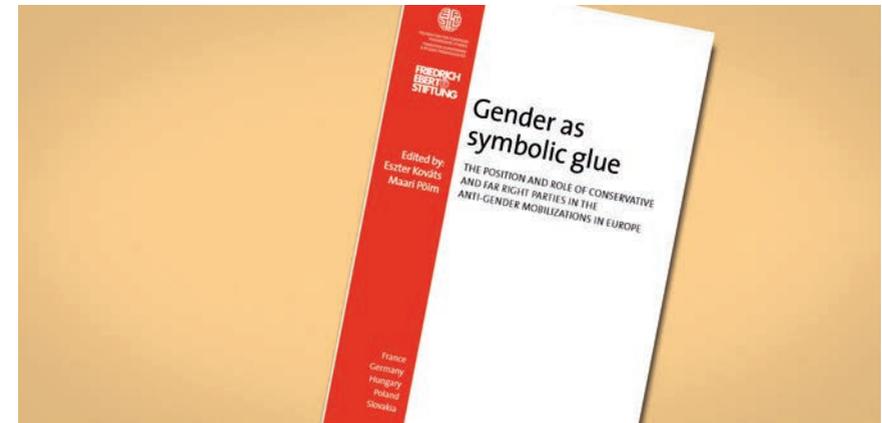
we are dealing with, when human rights and the progressive European tradition of equality are undergoing a redefinition.

The initial reaction to these movements was defensive: the response was simply that anti-gender movements did not actually understand what was meant by gender. Awareness-raising campaigns were launched. The second reaction was also defensive and attempted to underpin the justification for the existence of gender equality policy with appropriate arguments. Elżbieta Korolczuk (2014) has demonstrated that researchers have spoken of a ‘backlash’, which, however, falsely assumes a consensus as to what gender is and what it is intended to achieve with this concept. The third reaction, similar to a barricade of wagons, was the monitoring of anti-gender movements in social media. This included the close observation of the Catholic Church, which was perceived as the principal initiator and institutional organiser of anti-gender campaigns (Paternotte 2014). These analyses explicitly blame the Catholic Church, but do not take ongoing changes into account: the Catholic Church was never homogeneous and is currently attempting to face up to the challenges of the 21st century by changing its leadership structure, integrating more women into leading positions, while also opening up serious debates on gender issues (Marschütz 2014).

Counter-strategies

Science has been the battleground for particularly intensive ‘gender ideology’ struggles (Petó 2016). Thus new ‘scientific studies’ have been published, in which, for example, the emotional stability of children who grow up with two parents of the same sex is examined. In his comparison of developments in Slovenia and Croatia, Roman Kuhar has convincingly argued that the ‘scientific’ evidence provided by anti-gender movements against ‘gender ideology’ represents a paradigm shift in science as we know it: scientific findings are now disputed from a normative moral position. The selective citing of data taken out of context for the purpose of adopting ideological positions is one of the common methods used. Kuhar refers to this strategy as the ‘secularization of discourse to clericalize society’ (Kuhar 2014).

The post-modern approach to science – politically informed, critical, and interdisciplinary – has led to new concepts. Previously marginalised actors, who represent a critical perspective, such as the gender perspective, now



The anthology ‘Gender as symbolic glue’ (<http://bit.ly/1VQY5dT>) compares anti-gender movements in France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. Source: FES

had to be acknowledged. This was firmly based on normative decisions, such as making clear and recognising the respective position of the speaker(s). This also resulted in the challenging of the subject-object division with the subsequent development of new symbolisms, redefinitions – and new myths. This ‘positionality’ was recognised by the British historian Eric Hobsbawm in the following sentence: ‘My truth is equally valid as your truth.’ This is an anti-universal approach, which anti-gender forces are now appropriating.

The rendering visible of anti-gender developments and the denouncing of their activities – including the issue of what is now scientific for whom (‘naming and shaming’) – has only been partially successful, primarily because the gap between the various positions has been deepened without a real understanding of how the framework of human rights is threatened, and most importantly without finding new instruments or arguments for progressive policies.

A true counter-strategy, also applicable in the sense of a new ‘enchantment’ of the subject, would signify a change of both discourse and style. In Hungary, the FES organises the **dialogue** among female participants from Eastern Europe to discuss the issue from various perspectives. The themes to date – ‘motherhood’, ‘masculinities’, ‘love’, and ‘dignity’ – are at odds with previous conflict lines and open a new space for themes relating to

gender equality (Kováts 2015, Kováts and Pető – forthcoming). The dialogue forums functioned on a ‘transversal’¹ basis in the sense championed by Nira Yuval-Davis: accordingly, **concepts of difference should not replace concepts of equality but rather incorporate them**. This creates space for those people who want to commit themselves.

The first step in formulating counter-strategies is the **offensive: developing an independent strategy instead of reacting to attacks**. In doing so, it has to be accepted that a progressive politics is a result of enlightenment and thus works using the normative bases of enlightenment. In this process, minorities inevitably emerge and the feared ‘Othering’ occurs – that is to say, declaring somebody to be ‘other/different’. The European tradition of enlightenment works with normative positions. Anti-gender movements have adopted this approach, in order to launch a united attack on LGBTQ groups with the aim of strengthening the cohesion of Christian groups in Europe.

Anti-gender movements are a neoconservative, populist criticism of neo-liberal democracies (Grzebalska 2016). They represent **a hegemonic struggle for the redefinition of neo-liberal representative democracy, which is creating new conflict lines that a progressive politics has to bear in mind**. Anti-gender movements are a new phenomenon in European politics and are based on the failure of neo-liberal emancipation. Thus **progressive forces need a new conceptual model to find meaningful answers**. The struggle for emancipation and progress has always been associated with popular politics. If progressive forces do not relate to their valuable and innovative roots, they will revert to familiar gender equality policies, with which it will not be possible to successfully combat the new anti-gender course. In particular, their language not only separates the political goals from their supporters, but also fails to convey the utopian content of gender equality. Once more, we need the courage and originality of historical actors who dared to question what was previously understood as incontrovertible dogma in politics and society. **The ‘disenchanted’ progressive politics has to be ‘re-enchanted’**

[1] This is intended to avoid the traps not only of assimilationist and exclusive universalism, but also of essentialist identity politics. With the transversal politics, all sides recognise that their previous position may also be incomplete – but not ‘invalid’ (Nira Yuval Davis 1999: 94–98).

(Pető 2015b) **and should once again speak the everyday language of people – and not a functionalist jargon**.

In fact, the most effective means at the disposal of anti-gender movements is their new language. If, on the other hand, the abstract category of ‘gender’ is used to proceed in this struggle, this could have more of a destructive than positive effect in the long-term, because it is precisely this abstract framework of neo-liberal democracy that is the object of the attacks by anti-gender groups. The uncritical use of ‘gender mainstreaming’, ‘gender budgeting’, and other policies embedded into the neo-liberal system may even prevent alternatives and an appropriate language for today’s problems from being found.

The new challenge: not since the end of the Second World War have anti-modernists gained so many votes in democratic elections and been perceived as real alternatives. The far right is in vogue and their ‘so-called anti-genderism’ is a symbolic glue. The progressive forces must find alternatives. A few possible alternatives – recognising conflict lines, conducting dialogues, taking offensive action (instead of only reacting), providing actual answers, speaking the language of the people – have been mentioned in this article. Progressive actors have no time to lose.

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Koredigat: ESZTER KOVÁTS, FES Hungary

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Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has appointed women to half of the posts in his cabinet, making Canada fourth in the international ranking of countries with the highest proportion of women in ministerial offices. Photo: Reuters

BECAUSE IT'S 2015

Or why a Cabinet, half of which are women, can only be the beginning.

'Because it's 2015.' With these words, the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau explained why half of the posts in his Cabinet have been filled by women. This step, one of the election promises of the Liberal Party, attracted international attention. Canada can now be proud of its fourth place in the international ranking of countries having the highest proportion of women in ministerial positions – a marked improvement from 20th place under the previous Conservative government.

More than the Classic Portfolios

This is an important step. There are, nevertheless, critical voices who note that the ministries traditionally regarded to be of particular importance – such as the Foreign Ministry, Finance Ministry, and Ministry of Home Affairs – remain in men's hands. Nevertheless, it is not the case that the women in Trudeau's Cabinet 'only' hold the minor posts, such as Culture, Family, and Sport. Political heavyweights – including Chrystia Freeland (International Trade), Catherine McKenna (Environment and Climate Change), and Jody Wilson-Raybould (Justice) to name but a few – are also found in key positions.

In fact, Trudeau's government is not the first 'gender-balanced cabinet' in Canadian politics. At the provincial level – comparable with the federal states in Germany – Quebec had a cabinet in the last decade, half of whom were women. And in the cabinet of the Social Democratic government of the province of Alberta under Rachel Notley, there are more women than men.

Only Those Who Are Nominated Can Be Elected

However, what can be criticised – and should not be forgotten in spite of all the positive excitement generated – is the composition of parliament. Of a total of 338 MPs, only 88 are women. This is merely 26 per cent, and thus only one per cent more than before the last election in 2015. Yet this is not the fault of the opposition parties: only 27 per cent of MPs from the ruling Liberal Party are women. Although the Social Democratic NDP suffered heavy losses in the election, the fact that 41 per cent of their MPs are women must nevertheless be acknowledged.

The low number of women MPs is also reflected in the make-up of the parliamentary committees. The Canadian Parliament has 24 committees, each consisting of ten members. These committees play a key role in Canadian democracy. For example, they have an important function in the legislative process and check the public spending of each ministry. Three-quarters of the committees contain two or less women. There are even two committees – 'Data Protection' and 'Industry, Science, and Technology' – with no women at all.

One key reason for the catastrophically low representation of women MPs in the Canadian Parliament is that in the country's majority election system, women were not nominated in sufficient numbers for election by any of the parties. Only 33 per cent of all candidates nominated were women: for the major parties, the figure for the Conservatives was 20 per cent, Liberals 31 per cent, and NDP 43 per cent.

	All parties (incl. small parties)	Conservative	Liberal	NDP
Women nominated in %	33%	20%	31%	43%
Women elected in %	26%	17%	27%	41%

Nominated and elected women in the Canadian General Election in October 2015

This clearly reveals that women can only be elected when they are nominated – hardly an astounding insight. In this regard, all Canadian parties can significantly improve their performance in the next General Election (in 2019), 'because you can't be what you don't see'.

Not only Canada

Discussions on the representation of women politicians are also taking place in other parts of the world. Hillary Clinton has announced that if she is elected President of the United States, half of all ministerial posts will be filled by women. Thus Trudeau's 'Because it's 2015' continues to develop.

Local elections in Albania in June 2015 can also serve as a model. Diverse reform projects had been implemented in the country. One of the agreements was to set a 50 per cent gender quota for the nomination of candidates for the city council elections. And even though only 35 per cent of those elected were women, this is nevertheless a significant step forward. Due to the increasing demand, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Office in Tirana and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) intend to provide joint skills training for these women, in order to support them in their new roles. This should enable them to function effectively as political leaders at the municipal, regional, and national levels. A three-day summer school was organised for this purpose in 2015.

The issue of dealing with deep-rooted stereotypes also concerns progressive movements in Georgia, where hardly any women are represented in top political positions: only 17 of the 150 members of parliament are women. At the local level, such as the municipal decision-making bodies and the rural self-governing authorities, the proportion is even lower. Alongside the active promotion of women by means of knowledge transfer and motivational training, it is also necessary to counteract stereotypes that represent obstacles to a gender equitable society. Here, the Young Socialists of Georgia, supported by the FES, are committed to creating awareness, particularly in young people.

In order to ensure an increase in women's involvement in political – but also economic and social – development processes, as well as in filling positions in committees, structural conditions are required. Their creation must be closely monitored by progressive forces.

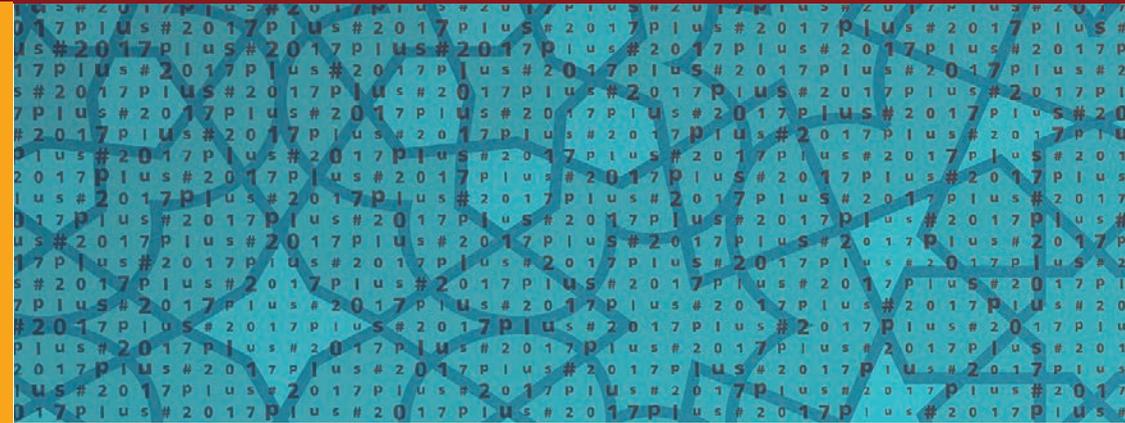
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Layout: Andrea Schmidt

ISLAMIC FEMINISM

Are Islam and feminism at all compatible or are they mutually exclusive? Such a critical-sceptical attitude is primarily based on the assumption that Islam is intrinsically a misogynist religion.

This prejudice is nourished by the media presentation of patriarchal Muslims and their oppression of women. In the emotion and heated debates about the headscarf, it has become apparent that this attitude is shared by many feminists.

Many critics of Islam claim to speak on behalf of the oppressed women, and, in doing so, veer between legitimate criticism and unsolicited appropriation of women's rights for their own purposes. As a result of the attacks on women on the night of New Year's Eve 2015/2016, in particular, the debate on the relationship between Islam and equal rights – which had always been problematic – have now become particularly virulent.

At the same time, there is agreement among Islamic feminists that women do not have to be liberated: there is a type of feminism that emerges from Islam itself, and a long Islamic tradition exists in the struggle for women's rights. This feminism, however, operates in a permanent area of tension: on the one hand, its legitimacy is often disputed by Western feminists; while on the other hand, Islamic actors frequently perceive it as a Western, anti-Islamic project. Thus, Islamic feminists are often subjected to a twofold pressure to justify themselves.

Across National Borders

Against this background, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) has provided Islamic feminists with the opportunity to exchange views across national borders and discuss the contents and characteristics of Islamic feminism. The 'Islamic Feminism – International Approaches' Conference was conceived by the FES in collaboration with the 'Aktionsbündnis muslimischer Frauen e.V.' (AmF) and the activist Kübra Gümüşay, and provided in-depth insights into various immigration countries and their respective debates. The women speakers from Belgium, France, and the United States (US) made clear how diverse both Islam and the gender images in Islam actually are. In this regard, the specific cultural and political conditions existing in each of the countries contribute to the complexity of the situation.

In the expert forums, the speakers reported on the current social reality of Muslim women in their own countries. It became clear that the debate about the headscarf is a recurrent theme in all immigration societies, which reveals much about the social status of Islam in each of the countries.



Appeal at the FES Conference in February 2016: recognise diversity within Islam, fight against stereotypes. Photo: plain picture

Hanane Karimi, from the University of Strasbourg, pointed out in her contribution how the principle of laïcité – i.e., laicism, the strict separation of religion and state – leads to a stigmatisation of French Muslims – and particularly of French Muslim women. The headscarf ban, introduced in 2004 in public institutions – including schools and universities – has resulted in the exclusion of many Muslim women from public life. Contrary to the aim of liberating the supposedly oppressed headscarf-wearing woman, this ban has led to massive restrictions on many French Muslim women. However, as Dr Malika Hamidi from the European Muslim Network explained, the situation in Belgium is very different: even in Parliament, female politicians can wear headscarves – this is a matter of course there.

In the US, the wearing of headscarves is protected by the constitution, as Hind Makki from the blog Side Entrance reported. This blog is a good example for Islamic-feminist activism: Muslim women from all over the US send the blog photos of women's prayer rooms in mosques, whose sparseness is for them an expression of the low appreciation accorded to women in their religious community. By this means, they work to attain the equal participation of women and a better inclusion into the Muslim community.

Education as the Central Strategy for Equal Rights

Despite the differing reality of life, the guests attempted to find an answer to the question of what should be understood by 'Islamic feminism' and how equal rights can manifest themselves in Islam. In her introductory lecture, Anse Tamara Gray – founder of the rabat.org website and scientist at the University of St. Thomas in the US – explained several key concepts of a religiously based Islamic feminism, which found wide agreement at the conference. These concepts are based on the wish of many Muslim women to represent feminist positions and simultaneously put them on an Islamic, theological basis.

Gray justifies the equal participation of men and women based on the Koran and Hadith religious sources and comes to the conclusion that it is not Islam as a religion that stands in the way of gender equality, but war, poverty, cultural ways of life, and the often knee-jerk rejection of all concepts associated with 'the West'. The key strategy for the emancipation and empowerment of Muslim women in this regard is education: women should learn Arabic to enable them to read the Koran themselves. This way, they would no longer be dependent on what is handed down by men and would be able to reject misogynous ways of life as un-Islamic. From Gray's point of view, financial independence is also a central element, because it would allow women to make their own decisions and, for example, free themselves from relationships where violence is normal.

The conference ended with an appeal for the future of Islamic feminism: the goal is to recognise diversity within Islam, fight against stereotypes and campaign together with other feminists for equal rights. In view of the situation of women who have fled conflicts and the growing number of Muslim women in Germany, this is a highly topical issue. The wish expressed at the end of the conference that it is necessary to think in relation to Islamic feminism on an intersectional basis – in order to respond effectively to the diversity of Muslim women in this country – also aimed in a similar direction.

With regard to the situation in Germany, the FES Discussion Forum held on 25 May 2016 also focused on Islamic feminism. On 5 October 2016, an event addressing Islamic feminism in the Middle East had taken place.

The FES publication 'Islamic Feminism – A Contradiction in Terms?' (<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/indien/12314.pdf>) also describes the discussion on the subject in India.

Author: DEBORAH OLIVEIRA



*Bettina Metz-Rolshausen, Managing Director of the German National Committee of UN Women:
An Improvement of gender equality for men and women – but still a long way from the goal.
Photo: Karina Heßland*

STRONG WOMEN FOR A STRONG WORLD

Twenty years after the last UN World Conference on Women, which was held in Beijing, the demands made there remain highly relevant. They include promoting gender equality in all areas of society, protecting women's rights, combating poverty of and violence against women, and reducing gender inequalities in healthcare and education.

The 20th anniversary of the Beijing Conference provided the occasion for the Thuringian Regional Office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) to organise a symposium under the slogan 'Strong Women for a Strong World – 20 Years after the UN Beijing World Conference on Women' on 9 November 2015. Bettina Metz-Rolshausen, the Managing Director of the German National Committee of UN Women and one of the conference's cooperation partners, described a significant improvement in gender equality, though still far from the goals agreed in 1995. This was confirmed by Brigitte Triems, who had attended the Beijing conference: The pressure and attention generated by the conference on the world public set in motion the gender equality policy debate, though much potential for improvement still exists. This was especially clear in the two symposium panels 'Violence against Women' and 'Women and Science'.

Where Do We Begin?

In 2014, every third woman in EU member states had been a victim of domestic and/or sexual violence at least once. The first panel's speakers agreed that in Europe, as well as in Germany and Thuringia, it is necessary to expand the range of women's shelters and advisory services for women as a matter of urgency. Although more vigorous prosecution and punishment of culprits have had some impact, it is now time to focus on prevention, sensitisation of the authorities, and assistance for the victims. With this in mind, better cooperation among activists was called for to highlight these issues.

The second panel concentrated on the question of why so few women are active in science, despite the high number of female graduates and students. Prof. Dr Dorothee Haroske, Equal Opportunities Officer at the Friedrich Schiller University Jena, put the blame and obligation on university administrations: They often pass these issues on to equal opportunities officers and do not make sufficient time and resources available. In the strongly male-dominated university administrations, the willingness to pursue equality of women in science is extremely limited. Consequently, structural change and (financial) support from regional governments are perceived here as an approach to improve matters.

The Goal: Sustainable Gender Equality Policy

'Where do we tackle this?' Here the conclusions and results were again discussed and packaged as suggestions for solutions. Dr Agnes Allroggen-Bedel, Deputy Federal Chairwoman of the Working Group of Social Democratic Women (AsF), expressed disappointment that the momentum generated by Beijing has not led to a national action platform: Gender parity at decision-making tables in politics and industry is an important step. Sufficient and permanent financing has been unanimously stated as the key criterion for a sustainable gender equality policy. After all: we cannot afford not to implement gender equality. Katrin Christ-Eisenwinder, Equal Opportunities Officer for the State of Thuringia, considered the first regional government under the control of an alliance of the Social Democratic Party, the Left Party and the Green Party to be a good prerequisite for the implementation of more gender mainstreaming.

Reaching allies, standing up, strengthening feminist women in decision-making positions – these were key demands presented at the conference.

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How can young people in Bavaria be politically supported? Left to right: Carolin Gerling (VISPIRON Engineering GmbH), Prof. Jutta Allmendinger (WZB), Sissi Pitzer (Bayerischer Rundfunk), Natascha Kohnen (BayernSPD). Photo: Magdalena Jooß

THE RECONCILABILITY OF WISHES AND REALITY

What do the life plans of (young) people and families look like? How do they shape the lives of young men and women? What expectations do they have of politics? These issues are key for the further development of modern societies – both in Germany and in Europe.

These questions are also explored in the new BayernForum study “Lebensentwürfe junger Frauen und Männer in Bayern” (‘Life Plans of Young Men and Women in Bavaria’), which was conducted on behalf of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) by Prof. Jutta Allmendinger, along with Sophie Krug von Nidda and Vanessa Wintermantel from the Berlin Social Science Center (WZB). What does the study, which was presented in February 2016 in Munich, reveal? Young people, men and women alike, want their own families with children; and they want to work. At the same time, however, they find themselves facing major obstacles when trying to realise this life plan, and are forced to make compromises – either with the family or the career. The irreconcilability of family and career is a recurrent theme in the study.

A study undertaken by the Department for Politics and Society (Forum PuG) – which investigates the realities of life as well as the family and gender equality policy expectations of women between the ages of 18 and 40 – comes to very similar conclusions. These women express great anxieties with regard to the reconcilability of family and career, and at the same time – in the instances where they do not yet have children – fear the retraditionalisation of their relationships and conflicts with their partners. Furthermore, they consider the state responsible for this. They demand investment in high-quality childcare services and other state-supported instruments.

Money for Time, Time for Money

It is often still women with children who reduce their working hours. ‘They exchange money, which they would earn in the labour market, for time for the family’, explains Jutta Allmendinger. They thereby accept the differences in earnings. They desire a partnership-based life model, which in reality, however, does not (yet) seem to be workable. In contrast, over half of the men surveyed have the impression that the family comes second to work. Nevertheless, men are reluctant to take long periods of parental leave, because ‘obstacles are placed in their way’ if they are absent from work for too long. Therefore, they keep working the same amount of time and earn more money, but are dissatisfied with their role in the family. As a result, today men find themselves in the discussion at a point ‘where women were 20 years ago’. Attaining a balance between career and family still remains difficult, and the reality is that the desired partnership model is nowhere close to being achieved.



Support at the workplace is important. Left to right: Sally Brett (TUC), Mareike Richter (DGB), and Kristin Linke (FES Berlin) discussing how to create better framework conditions for working mothers. Photo: Andre Weisser

Family Policy Challenges in Germany and Europe

The fact that family policy, in particular, faces major challenges and in its current form sometimes ignores the reality of life for families is revealed in a comparative study undertaken by the FES London and the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), which takes account of developments in Germany and the United Kingdom (UK). In the UK, people look enviously at the German parental leave model. The regulations in the UK are less comprehensive, while particularly providing for a significantly lower level of earnings replacement benefits. The development of flexible working time models, on the other hand, is a key demand of German and British experts. A European comparison thus reveals both marked differences and similarities in the area of family policy.

An international policy analysis of family and gender policy discourses in nine countries – Denmark, Germany, France, Britain, Austria, Sweden, Switzerland, Hungary, and the US – shows similar findings. In many countries, the issue of reconcilability is now perceived to be a key element in the process of accelerating the stronger participation of women in the labour market. Nonetheless, there is still a long path to creating genuine reconcilability – especially for women. The institutional conditions and approaches in the individual countries are very different and reveal a wide spectrum of political instruments. A new instrument, which has been

under discussion in Germany for some time, might be able to provide benefits to reconcilability: the study conducted in Bavaria points out that a family working time of 30 hours per week is a first step in the right direction. Despite all its risks, digitalisation also harbours opportunities: working models containing greater flexibility are already in use here. This creates new possibilities – for example, avoiding the trap of part-time work by working from home instead.

Who Is Bringing Home the Bacon?

On the one hand, we are still dealing with strong ‘traditional’ time use structure of men and women, a different reality is nevertheless revealed today in many households in Europe, partly due to the continuing transformation of lifestyles and family structures. Whether as single mothers or as main earners – more and more mothers are the ‘breadwinners’ in their families. They are the ones who bring home the bacon.

According to the London study, currently, 33 per cent of working mothers in the UK are the main breadwinners in their household; in Germany, the figure is 27 per cent, while the EU average is 31.4 per cent, based on figures for 2013. Although this often occurs in low-income families, the group of mothers with degrees is also strongly represented. The majority of ‘maternal breadwinners’ are no longer young women, have older children of school age, and are disproportionately often employed in services and the public sector. In both countries (Germany and the UK), single mothers represent about half of these mothers. Family policies also have to accommodate this reality, and in this regard, the expansion of childcare facilities is only one of the key demands.

Social Rethinking Required!

Still, a socio-political rethink is first necessary for individual political measures to become effective in this area. Only when a woman who returns to her career shortly after giving birth is no longer regarded as an ‘uncaring mother’ and it is normal for the father to reduce his working hours for the good of the family and also take more than only two months parental leave – up to and including parity – will the partnership-based life model have a chance of success. Another PuG study is devoted

to the issue of the conditions under which fathers reduce their working hours after the period in which the childrearing allowance is paid. Here, companies have to develop measures to provide more family-friendly climates.

Prof. Allmendinger introduced fundamental considerations on working life into the discussion in Munich: although the healthy life expectancy has increased in the last 150 years, far too much is still being squeezed into the rush hour of life. Given that many young people would also rather work four days a week than five, it is time to discuss a reduction in weekly working hours – not only for parents but for all employees – at a socially responsible level.

The conclusion to be drawn from these studies is that what is required is greater government assistance, in order to promote the partnership between family and career – and thus also more gender equality.

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BayernForum study: www.bayernforum.de/publikationen.html

Contact: ANNA-LENA KOSCHIG (Director) and
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FES London study: <http://bit.ly/28JnAdM>

Contact: ULRICH STORCK (Director) and
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**Department politics and society (PuG) study on the working
time pattern of fathers:** <http://bit.ly/28JkIIQ>

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**Department politics and society (PuG) study on realities of
life as well as family and gender equality policy expectations
of women between the ages of 18 and 40 years:**

<http://bit.ly/29OUID7>

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**On the way to gender equality?: Reports from Austria, Den-
mark, France, Germany, Hungary, Sweden, Switzerland, the
United Kingdom and the United States:** <http://bit.ly/26uJQRw>

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Esteban Paulón, since 2010 President of the Federación Argentina de Lesbianas, Gays, Bisexuales y Trans – FALGBT. Photo: Christian Sassone

HOMOSEXUALITY AND TRANS- GENDERISM IN ARGENTINA

**Interview with Esteban Paulón, since 2010
President of the Federación Argentina de Lesbianas,
Gays, Bisexuales y Trans – FALGBT**

FES: The LGBT community in Germany is impressed by what it sees in Argentina. Homosexuality there seems to be generally accepted by society. In July 2010, Argentina became the first country in Latin America to allow the marriage of same-sex couples. How is it possible to explain this positive development in a country where in the 1980s and 1990s, homosexuals were still being persecuted?

Esteban Paulón: The most important thing was that during the 2001 crisis, the LGBT movement – working together with other social movements – put their topics and demands on the political agenda and thus became visible. Furthermore, the political climate was more receptive when President Kirchner had the ‘National Plan against Discrimination’ drawn up and centre-left parties – (Partido Socialista, Partido GEN, Nuevo Encuentro, Coalición Cívica ARI) – included the issue of sexual diversity in their programmes. And finally, the Federación Argentina LGBT (FALGBT), established in 2005, brought together movements from all over the country and dedicated itself to achieving our demands: same-sex marriage, gender identity, anti-discrimination laws, removal of homosexuality and travesty cabarets from criminal law, inclusion of ‘diversity’ in sex education. Ten years after its founding, FALGBT has achieved almost all of its goals.

FES: Why is the LGBT lobby so strong? Who supports you from the political side? Why did Cristina Kirchner stand up for you?

Paulón: The LGBT community is a significant minority today because we were able to incorporate our agenda into the other movements. We built up alliances with a wide range of movements and supported the founding of LGBT groups in the political parties – from Conservatives to Trotskyists. This, in turn, gives us strong support and influence on both the decision-making and the political planning processes. The backing provided by the Kirchner government arose from the interpretation of the demand for equality as a global political moment, in which the LGBT rights became representative for other non-redeemed rights. Overall, our concept of equality has enriched society, and the Kirchner government – in a moment of political weakness – understood that it could thus connect with broad parts of society.

FES: How are the democratic parties of the left positioned in this regard – or is this not an issue?

Paulón: For a long time, the traditional parties of the left were relatively suspicious of the LGBT agenda, only integrating parts of it by reason of their solidarity with the feminist movement. In the 1990s, the topic was for the first time included in legislative initiatives of the Socialists and Radicals. It was only in the last decade that the LGBT activism programmatically came to the centre-left parties. The Partido Socialista was the first party to include LGBT equality in its programme and created the Secretariat for Sexual Diversity in its Executive Committee.

FES: How do full adoption rights for same-sex couples look in practice?

Paulón: The law on same-sex marriage transfers all marriage rights, including that of adoption, to homosexual couples. The implementation, however, lies in the hands of judges, who can either agree to the adoption or refuse it – depending on his/her own subjective feelings. In the rural provinces, in particular, prejudices frequently make the application of the law difficult. In addition, same-sex couples have access to in vitro fertilisation and surrogate motherhood, however, the latter – albeit not regulated by law – is legally permissible.

FES: To what extent is this anchored in society, and not merely a paragraph? Is the liberal spirit concentrated only in the capital? What is the situation with the macho-gauche culture in other provinces?

Paulón: The law is applicable in the entire country and is implemented in practice. The social debate, the majority political support, and the visibility of the LGBT community – together with the rights they fought for – have led to a change in attitudes and thinking. It goes without saying that regional differences exist in the degree of acceptance: it is naturally different in the cities than in the heartland and the ‘tradition-minded’ provinces of Argentina.

FES: Foreign tourists can also enter into ‘homosexual’ marriage in Argentina. Has this worked? Has there been a boom in tourism?

Paulón: Same-sex marriage for tourists was implemented in 2012 by FAGBT in Rosario and was a political demand. It is a question of securing the public good of 'access to the same rights' on a worldwide basis. Same-sex marriage exists in only 24 countries. Argentina generally allows tourists to marry here without any special requirements. For us, it is a question of the same access to this right.

FES: Argentina is a predominately Catholic country with a Pope who in 2010 called the new law an 'attack on God's plan'. What social forces was the Church able to outsmart? Or is the Church no longer so dominant?

Paulón: It is necessary to distinguish between the leadership and the basis of the Church: the basis has supported the discussion and enactment of the law. The leadership, on the other hand, worked against the law: bishops put pressure on individual governors, senators, and members of parliament. The former Bishop Bergoglio (and today's Pope) was emphatically against the law, but once it was passed, the church leadership in Argentina – unlike many other countries – did not oppose its implementation.

The interview was conducted by MARÍA RIGAT-PFLAUM, FES Argentina, December 2015.



*Experts from six countries took part in a debate in Pakistan about Political Feminism.
Photo: FES Pakistan*

FROM DIVERSITY TO SOLIDARITY

To launch a new working line by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) in Asia, a workshop entitled 'Political Feminism in Asia' was held in Islamabad/Bhurban from 20-23 October 2015.

Regional FES Offices sent experts from Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, and Thailand to Pakistan to exchange collected experiences and develop new approaches to political work. A public seminar at Quaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad was followed by a second, internal part of the programme at a quiet retreat in the surrounding mountains – the intention was to ensure sufficient space for the discussion on political feminism.

It was quickly possible to identify the common ground among the feminist movements in the various countries: despite the challenges faced by the different characteristics of the political systems and of the differing cultural norms, women's movements in Asia have certainly faced many similar experiences in the struggle against patriarchal power structures. The countries represented were, and remain, in close contact via groups and networks, with movements that campaign for democracy and social justice. Furthermore, in the recent past a progressive 'depoliticisation' of the debates and actors has been determined, which has developed in parallel to the strong dependency of the mostly weak civil societies on international donors.

The closing session of the FES workshop provides an encouraging prospect for the future: it was agreed that a new transnational feminism is required – adapted to the changed conditions of the 21st century. The summary reads 'From Diversity to Solidarity': perceiving the differing starting conditions and heterogeneity of the actors as a strength for the purpose of promoting more solidarity within the feminist and social movements – FES Asia is addressing this matter and in the coming years will develop a regional platform to deepen the debates. The aim here also includes promoting the exchange of experiences between the actors and developing common strategies designed to build alliances and shape feminist narratives.

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Good mood at 'Love: Personal? Political?'
Photo: István Fazekas

ON LOVE, NEO-LIBERALISM, AND FEMINISM

The regional FES gender project 'Gender equality in East-Central Europe' deals with gender policy issues designed to promote public dialogue and provide gender equality advice. We look back on two exciting projects.

Love and Politics

How political is love? – This is the key issue of the public dialogue forum ‘Love: Personal? Political?’, which took place in October 2015 in Budapest. Furthermore, how does the way we talk about love change our society and our gender relations? The subject of ‘love’ is a key aspect of gender equality, and there are many different ways that social and economic framework conditions can influence how love blossoms. Since 2014, the FES gender project has been organising dialogue forums intended to bring people from the fields of politics, civil society, and science into contact with each other and to seek common foundations, on the basis of which gender equality can be discussed. Here, the ideological heterogeneity of participants is revealed time and again – and this was also the case with the subject of ‘love’.

On one hand, the discussion focused on the critical examination of the neo-liberal economic system, which is based on individuality and consumption and manipulates our ideas of love, and on the other hand, on the concept of ‘eternal men and women’ as a stereotype without reference to gender aspects or the psychological conditions for a fulfilled love. The conclusion reached was that efforts to find common formulations and hold a constructive debate about love demonstrate a transformative and emancipatory potential – including for our living together. An edited, English-language version of the lectures is available at <http://bit.ly/2dqtKpa>.

Neo-liberalism and Feminism

The criticism of neo-liberalism and the discussion about alternatives consistently neglect aspects of feminism and feminist economics. This discussion is mainly conducted in Europe on a ‘gender-blind’ basis. The basic thesis of the working line from the FES gender project in East-Central Europe on the theme of ‘Neo-liberalism and Feminism’ was that there can be no socially just Europe without feminism. Since the spring of 2015, the project has intensively addressed the context of the (criticism of) neo-liberalism and feminism, bringing together activists and scientists from Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, who have discussed this subject from their own regional perspectives.



*Within the context of ‘Love: Personal? Political?’, Gergely Szilvay, journalist and PhD student, addresses the relationship between conservatism and gender equality.
Photo: István Fazekas*

The contexts in Eastern Central Europe are to some extent different than in Western Europe. In Eastern Central Europe, it was long considered a matter of course to accept without criticism that the democratic transformation was – out of necessity – associated with the neo-liberal variant of capitalism. Thus, those who attempted to critically analyse the evil in the new economic system were quickly regarded as backward-looking, socialist, and undemocratic. This also affected the feminist movement, which thereupon ‘conformed’ with their concerns. This resulted in the discussion on ‘equality pays off’ and the (middle-class) work-life balance – to name but two examples – commonly being conducted without raising the problematic issue of the structural inequalities that are also brought about by the economic system.

In order to present perspectives from Eastern Central Europe, not only were approaches of the feminist critique of neo-liberalism discussed, but also criticism of feminism in the region tinged with neo-liberalism. The participants’ contributions are available at www.fesbp.hu/gender.

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PUBLICATIONS

On the way to gender equality?: Reports from Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States

The study consolidates experiences and actual family and gender policy discourses from nine countries. As such, a broad overview of the approaches and debates within the individual countries is concisely formulated and made comparable in report form.

For further reading: L. Eigenmann, Y. Holl, E. Kováts, J. Menge, K. Nink, A. Rosenplänter, A. Salles, C. Schildmann: On the way to gender equality?: Reports from Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States (2016): <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/ipa/12476.pdf>

Foundation of the Nation: How Political Parties and Movements are Radicalising Others in Favour of Conservative Family Values and against Tolerance, Diversity, and Progressive Gender Politics in Europe

A movement has been forming in Europe for some time in favour of conservative family values, against tolerance and diversity, and against progressive gender policy. The enemy is known as 'gender ideology'. In Germany, the AfD party currently stands at the centre of this movement. In his survey published in 2014, Andreas Kemper investigates the conservative gender and family political networks and movements within the European Union, the controversies within the EU parliament, the AfD's activities at the EU level, and its family and gender policy drafts for Saxony, Thuringia, and Brandenburg. This survey has now also been published in English.

For further reading: A. Kemper: Foundation of the Nation: How Political Parties and Movements are Radicalising Others in Favour of Conservative Family Values and against Tolerance, Diversity, and Progressive Gender Politics in Europe (2016): <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/dialog/12503.pdf>

Islamic Feminism – A contradiction in terms?

In the non-West, feminism has largely been considered an alien concept, contrary to indigenous norms and traditions. Associated with Western colonial intrusion, feminism per se and Western feminism in particular, are easily discredited as an attack on the cultural authenticity of non-West societies and a corrupting influence. When questions of gender justice emerged, there were efforts to frame women's concerns in the context of the specificities of their situation rather than with reference to the standards set by Western feminism. Religion, inevitably, was to play a major role in this enterprise. It is in this context that questions about the possibility and desirability of Islamic feminism arise.

For further reading: A. Ahmad: Islamic Feminism – A contradiction in terms? (Gute Gesellschaft 2017plus) (2015): <http://bit.ly/2dqnxw>

Who's breadwinning in Europe? A comparative analysis of maternal breadwinning in Great Britain and Germany

The nature of work, earning and family relationships has changed. The model of a male breadwinner and a female carer as the „default“ for European families is long gone. With the employment rate of women – and especially mothers – having risen, dual-earner couples are more common.

For further reading: G. Cory, A. Stirling: Who's breadwinning in Europe? A comparative analysis of maternal breadwinning in Great Britain and Germany (2015): <http://bit.ly/28JnAdM>

A quiet farewell?: current developments in EU gender equality policy

Particularly since the mid-1990s a great deal of fresh momentum in respect of equality policy has come from the EU. Over the last few years however the EU's gender equality policy has become noticeably less visible and its political relevance has dwindled.

For further reading: I. Pimminger: A quiet farewell?: current developments in EU gender equality policy (2015): <http://bit.ly/2exrHgB>

Gender as symbolic glue: The position and role of conservative and far right parties in the anti-gender mobilizations in Europe

This publication is a result of a successful cooperation between the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and the regional gender programme of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) on critically analyzing anti-gender discourses in European far right and conservative party programmes and the role of the respective parties in shaping the discourse and mobilisations. The publication looks at five case studies: France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia with the purpose to comparatively examine the commonalities and divergences of this phenomenon, also offering a chronological overview.

For further reading: E. Kováts, M. Põim: Gender as symbolic glue: The position and role of conservative and far right parties in the anti-gender mobilizations in Europe (2015): <http://bit.ly/1VQY5dT>

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