

Contribution to the roundtable of Kata Kevehazi (Hungarian Women's Lobby) in the Roundtable on the Civil society review about gender equality and childcare, Brussels, 13 March 2019

According to the Prime Minister of Hungary, women are too emotional to politics. The way how President of the Parliament has formulated the views of FIDESz on women: „we would like our daughters to consider the highest quality of self-realization that they could give us grandchildren”.

In Hungary, there is the widest power gap between women and men in Europe: women's political participation is around 10%, there is no female minister in the cabinet, so women have no influence on the distribution of state budget resources.

Strengthening families and protecting the country from migration is the focus of government's populist communication. Viktor Orbán, who is following the Putin pattern, is constantly creating hate campaigns and building up a unique concentration of political and economic power. Now he has a large number of fans and followers all across Europe and even worldwide.

His politics – promotion of conservative gender roles, the enhancement of social inequalities and the open proclamation of intolerance - this must be seen – are contradicting to the fundamental values of the European Union. However the EU finances him, and maintains his rule.

The indifference and inability of the EU is also responsible for what is happening in Hungary, since it is clear from the beginning where we are going. In 2010, 9 years ago, one of the government's first steps was to withdraw the kindergarden education program to eliminate gender stereotypes. In 2011, during the EU Presidency, Hungary has explicitly committed itself to implementing family mainstreaming in all its policies instead of gender mainstreaming, and to exert an influence on the prevailing views and practices of other countries.

In Hungary, FIDESz is consistently building up its system for conserving social and gender hierarchies and ensuring concentration of power. He changed the constitution, the judiciary, brought the media under control, centralized the entire public sector and public administration, set up a budget allocation system that keeps all branches of power and much of the economy under control. FIDESz has set up a tendering system for building its own clientele from EU resources. That has enabled participants of calls to be placed on a preference list through open or concealed corruption, making them the beneficiaries of the system, while others on on the prohibition lists, making for them impossible to maintain their operation.

As far as the distribution of funds targeted on gender equality programs is concerned, already from 2011 it was only possible to apply for EU funding with attachment of a written declaration of support from the FIDESZ-ruled municipalities, which meant and resulted that only NGOs that were well-adapted to the FIDESZ policy line had received any grant distributed in Hungary.

The European Commission's Country Report reports very pragmatically to all the changes that Hungary has made to ensure work-life balance. However, the report does not take into account the fact that the Hungarian government is engaged in hypocritical communication towards both the EU and the domestic population.

The family and employment policy measures, and the conditions for implementing the EU-funded projects are in fact contradictory to the objectives of the EU, whether it is to promote gender equality or flexible employment. The government finances the crisis and carrier centers of women through a newly created so-called Family-friendly Non-Profit Company, that previously existed as a sailing company (!). The Family and Career Points are managed by newly-established women's organizations, in some cases led by wives of local mayors. The task of this network is to promote traditional family roles, large families, and to support the reconciliation of family and work.

In reality FIDESz's laws on Family protection, and the permanent propaganda of conservative concept of gender roles in the long term captures the unbalanced division of domestic tasks, reproduces discrimination of women in the labor market, increases the vulnerability of women at home and also in the labor market.

The regulation of employment also contributes to the deterioration of the situation of the vulnerable groups of women, as the New Labor Code, adopted in 2012, significantly reduced workers' rights, and abolished the employment protection of women with children under 3 years of age.

As a result of FIDESz social and economic policies young people, men, and families with children are migrating massively from Hungary. In response to the regional and structural labor shortages, the government introduced a new law about overtime: the employers have the right to order 400 hours of overtime (previously 250 hours), and to withhold for 3 years the payment of the amount above the basic wage (when using the flexible form of so called working time framework).

The increased demand for permanent labor force absorbs the rural female population, that play an increasingly important role in maintaining their family. That phenomena contributes largely to the favorable labor market statistics. However, it does not reflect the real working and living conditions of working women. Their conditions are largely determined by the constantly deteriorating state of the social care system, health care and education. Prospects for the future of Roma girls have been worsened by the reduction of compulsory education age, women with disabilities still continue to live as an invisible social group. The real intentions of the government to reduce the care burden of women is well reflected in the fact that it has increased the amount of monthly care allowance for women with disabilities, but this amount is still below the minimum subsistence level, and there is no sign of its intention to develop the care system for those in need.

Behind the propaganda about family values we should see the real political intention to help the privileged social groups – the upper middle class. The amount of the only universal support to families, the so-called child allowance remains unchanged from 2008.

At the same time, there were measure to promote large families, tax reduction, housing support to by real estates and the recently announced family protection action plan provide significant benefits, non-refundable grants, interest-free loans for couples that assume to give birth to at least 3 children, and from now, women giving birth to 4 or more children, will not pay personal income taxi in their entire life. (We should add here, that the employment rate of mothers in large families is still on of the lowest in Europe). However, if the sufficient number of children is not achieved, or the couple divorce, the non-refundable allowances and interest-free credit are becoming repayable.

Women in Hungary today are therefore encouraged to give birth for financial benefits. These targeted and selective family support creates a division line amongst those who have and those who are not having children, the pressure on women is growing. The long term effects of these policies promoted constantly in the media are not understood by the majority, as gender-sensitiveness is very low in Hungary.

To conclude my comments about the report, I would say that it is crucial to pay much more attention to the qualitative analysis of processes, the evaluation of trends and the resolution. Without that the incomplete data could not describe the real situation.

I think also, that the practice of ex-post control of the use of EU funds is counter-productive. The price is ultimately paid by citizens, which undermines confidence in the Union. This reactive approach should be replaced by proactive mechanisms that ensure that European citizens' contributions are actually used in line with the EU's objectives and, above all, its core values.