
KORČULA SCHOOL 2013¹
**“RECONCILING WORK AND LIFE – CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, BEST PRACTICES AND
POLICIES”**



KEY MESSAGES

- a. **Conservative backlash regarding gender equality and women’s status is felt throughout the region, with different intensity.** In the CEE region women are experiencing “a silent crisis” whereby the economic situation and austerity measures, more often than not remain neo-liberal affecting gender equality. Can the left start changing the societal discourse and rules of the game, which in transition have been/are neo-liberal? Can the SD/left have a clearer response, if nothing than among its party ranks and societal/electoral campaigns? Can there be a better, conceptually and ideologically, formulated definition of the “private” and “personal” in democratic societies and political/ideological responses?

¹ The 2013 “Korčula School”, building on the political platform developed in 2012, was to, in a think tank and informal format i. discuss political, social and economic choices and possible solutions that can help shape work-life policies and practice in South Eastern Europe, within the broader EU framework; ii. address substantively concrete issues of reconciling work and life policies (nexus between employment, social policies and gender equality); iii. inform social-democratic, progressive and left party and government policies in the region, as well as PESW and PES positioning on these issues for the upcoming European Parliament elections in 2014.

- b. **Employment and social policies are the responsibility of the State, which however implies:** i. political party action and work with its electoral base, especially in terms of national-local and vice versa political awareness and action/implementation; ii. social-democratic, left and progressive political parties to remain true to their values when in government; iii. strong cooperation with the civil society, including the private sector, to ensure that SD, left and progressive political options can become a reality; iv. strong and continues work with the electorate (also in between elections) to absorb the tension around reality, challenges and solutions
- c. **Reconciling work and life policies** cuts across employment policies, social welfare systems and gender equality action. Social-democratic governments and their left coalitions should strive to formulate cross-sectoral, integrated and consistent policy packages. This is also important for those countries members of the EU, in terms of preparations for EP elections.
- d. **Employment policies need to:** i. ensure the protection of human rights of women and men (women who have not found employment for a long period of time, women of 55 years of age, young women, single mothers, minority women, women with special needs, women with low levels of education); ii. **provide a plethora of measures to ensure flexibility, adaptability and versatility** in terms of meeting the needs of the different social groups²; iii. **address the pay gap existing among men and women throughout Europe**, but also in the region and support the PES/PES Women platform/campaign including the “glass ceiling”(real, fictional or reversible).
- e. **Recommendations**, among others:
- i. revise labour laws from the perspective of protection of women’s labour right;
 - ii. establish special employment policies for the vulnerable women groups who have difficulties in finding employment;
 - iii. provide incentives for men to enter “traditionally women’s professions” e.g. in health, education, care economy and labour accessibility;
 - iv. better apply the principle of flexi-security in the private and public sectors to decrease the divisions within the labour market and help balance work and family life as well as revisit part-time job policies from ideological and gender perspectives;
 - v. sanction employers who discriminate against women due to their family status or desire to establish a family, often a feature of the private sector;
 - vi. change and amend legal regulation stipulating gender equality and its harmonization with European legislation and enforce implementation;
 - vii. support PES and PES Women in the campaign to reduce the pay gap between men and women;
 - viii. strengthen cooperation with TUs.

Can SDPs, left and progressive forces be clearer on solutions that go beyond neo-liberal models and be more forceful in advancing innovative economic and social responses, remaining true to the politics and mission of social-democracy?

- f. **Social policies and welfare measures need to accompany labour laws.** Social care in the CEE region is as much about formulation of innovative and alternative solutions/policies that would meet the

² Flexible working time can be helpful both to workers and employers. This is not important only due to the length workers spend at the job, but also in the way working hours are organized/distributed in the workplace. This can have significant implications for the quality of professional life, wellbeing of workers, efficiency and competitiveness of enterprises. “Flexi-time” can help reduce absence from work, improve working relationships, productivity and work quality. When selecting models - forms of flexible working hours – it is important to take into account the needs, shape and character of the professional activity and its relationship to other activities, social/public implications and citizens’ rights and interests, territorial and climate differences and specificities, traditional and family life and needs and their adaptation to meet professional obligations public transportation measures etc. However, reconciling work and life remains an elusive and often not pertinent issue for women who have no opportunities to advance their careers, e.g. women working in supermarkets.

standards of social justice and human (and women's) rights as it is about implementation instruments and tools. It seems that tools and instruments, often internationally promoted, are to say the least ideologically neutral, if not ideologically (read neo-liberally) tinted.

- g. **SDP and progressive political and social forces are more often than not on the defensive when it comes to being clear on promoting positive, affirmative and innovative macro-policies and action.** There is a deficit and clarity in communication of both positive measures and challenges to the electorate and the party base. The same applies to implementation – alternative policies are just not a matter of money, but of ideological clarity, political will and courage. For instance, is the “resilience” and “coping strategies” concept tied to sustainable development and green economy about resilience and coping or about substantive political, ideological, social justice alternatives and innovative solutions?
- h. **Regional cooperation and exchange** is of particular importance since there are few fora for this. The region is still in “transition” which, most often than not, is negatively impacting on social welfare and structures.
- i. **Preparations for 2014 EP elections need to promote:** transparency and “clean” politicians, as key characteristic of SD, left and progressive parties; enforcement of rule of law and ideological consistency of “alternative” macro-economic and social policies to meet the standards of the EU, social justice, equality and human rights; small number of key, targeted (politically and audience wise) political messages, highlighting positive examples either from own or EU SD/left practice, and not campaign for a “Christmas Tree”; messages to meet the aspirations of women and the young.

The 2013 “Korčula School” was organized through a grant from the Olof Palme International Center (Sweden). It was attended by 25 party and women's organisations high level representatives from South Eastern Europe and guests form other European countries.

<http://www.europeanforum.net>