



Think Tank Korčula School

- Transforming Politics through a Gender lens-

Recover, Restart, Retool

Regional and gender equality perspectives

1- 4 October 2020

-DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS -

Introduction

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic and the uncertainty of travel possibilities, especially across borders, the 2020 Korčula School was held on-line over four days 1-4 October 2020. e-Roundtables (five sessions) were organized by the CEE Gender Network with its partners, FEPS, PES Women, European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity and regional partners.

From the prism of South Eastern Europe/regional perspectives on the crisis provoked by the CORONA-19 pandemic the discussions addressed the current political environment in the region, especially post parliamentary elections in some countries. The focus was on economic and social policies to address the post-crisis three Rs – Recovery, Restart, Retool. More specifically the sessions addressed:

- i. feminist lens to economic recovery – chance to get it right
- ii. social care – gender sensitive social care systems and strengthening capacities to transform and retool
- iii. restart and retool –progressive and socialdemocratic political responses
- iv. the current political, economic and social environment in the region and implications for human rights and gender equality

Participants stressed the importance of the 2020 Korčula School and the need to develop it further into a think tank forum for social-democratic parties, women’s forums, foundations and progressives in the Western Balkans to discuss emerging challenges, debate solutions and provide good practice and empower and mutually support each other.

For the benefit of our stakeholders, the meeting was recorded and livestreamed. Recommendations and political messages from each session will feature, without attribution, in the final report. The meeting was in English with interpretation provided by our Belgrade office.

Highlights from the discussion featured in the report below can be found at: www.ceegendernetwork.eu and specific e-Rountable discussions and individual contributions are available at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmeBUGB14N8vu41kWxSOCAA>

Women in Europe are working hard, but the economy is not working for women. In the year 2020, the gender gaps in employment, earnings and unpaid care work remain so wide and women's situation on the labour market is so precarious that it is possible to talk of a 'feminisation of poverty' in Europe.

The COVID-19 crisis has further highlighted the economic inequalities between women and men. While women play a key role in helping the world through overcoming the pandemic as healthcare workers, teachers and more, few are recognised due to persistent inequalities, biases & stereotypes that have been exacerbated throughout the crisis. Women in part-time, low-paid and precarious work have lost their jobs, female-dominated industries like hospitality and tourism are on the ropes, and women who make up the majority of essential service and healthcare workers are exposed to unsafe working conditions. At the same time, the lockdown brought new challenges for women's work-life balance and an increased burden of unpaid care responsibilities for children, other dependents and their communities.

With COVID-19 putting at risk the hard-won advances achieved on women's rights in past decades, it also finally spotlights that the current economic system is unfit to work for women. But will the demands of feminist and women's movements be heard and transcend the glass ceiling? Can we use this crisis to finally shift towards a more equal and just society that leaves no one behind?

The e-discussion was viewed by 682 viewers online

The Moderator of the session was Ana Pirtskhalava, YES Secretary General (Georgia), the e-discussion was opened by Daša Šašić Šilović, Chair, CEE Network International Board, President The European Partners for the Environment and the keynote address was delivered by Zita Gurmai, President PESW, Vice President MSZP (Hungary), CEE Network International Board. Panelists were Lina Gálvez Muñoz, MEP S&D Group in the European Parliament, Karolina Leaković, former Women's Forum President, SDP Croatia, Nela Porobić Isaković, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Laura Albu, Vice President, European Women's Lobby, Romania

"Inequalities are increasing... Wellbeing is decreasing... Women are in the forefront, but risking to be left behind again. Let us build back better!"

Female unemployment is on the increase, employment is becoming more precarious. Service industry are not well paid most being provided by women. Migrant women are left behind as regional labour mobility is curtailed.

While it is fact that domestic violence is on the rise during the pandemic, the longer-term consequences including on women's health remain to be seen

The pandemic has particularly stretched unpaid work for women having to juggle home chores, childcare, elderly care, working from home. VAW, emotional and other consequences on women are felt.

One thing is obvious – due to the pandemic women's health has been affected and their access to gynaecological facilities and reproductive health consultations (including legal interruption of pregnancy and contraceptives) has been curtailed.

The damage inflicted by neo-liberal policies in the region resulted in significant cuts or lack of investments in the health and overall social sectors, as well as in terms of the volatility and precariousness of the labour market.

Differentiation and disaggregation of vulnerabilities in short term and long term response is necessary to address the most needy and not to exacerbate poverty levels, especially among women, many heading single households. Migrant women are left behind

There is a need to clearly conceptualise and define feminist economy (is it gender mainstreaming in the economy) especially in view of gender sensitive budgeting which has been practiced since Beijing 1995.

The coronavirus outbreak has been a major shock for our global economies and for our, as can be seen now, fragile social systems, especially in the Western Balkans. Overstretched health and welfare systems, inadequate investments in health care and social care, inadequate wages for social workers and drain of care workers migrating to Western Europe has been exposed in this pandemic.

The effects are felt on a much bigger magnitude for women. They have been in the forefront of handling the crisis as care workers or working in other essential sectors. Equally they remain key unpaid care providers in private households and the society as a whole.

At the same time, although there is a lack of reliable data, there is a significant number of migrant women from Eastern and South Eastern Europe working as care workers in Western Europe. They are often working in precarious and underpaid, as well as unregulated, work conditions. Therefore, the questions of gender equality and decent work require a more prominent place on the European agenda.

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), the CEE Gender Network and the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) have joined forces to gain a better grasp of social care regimes and to address major intra-EU tensions arising from the imbalance between Eastern and South Eastern countries care workforce supply and Southern and Western care workforce needs. This constitutes an important building block of the #Eucares4care Roadshow, part of the joint FES-FEPS project “Feminist Europe – Does Europe care for care?”.

“The social dimension was born again out of the crisis”.

The e-discussion was viewed by 668 viewers online

Moderator: Türkan Karakurt, Director, FES Zagreb, keynote address was delivered by Laszlo Andor, Secretary General FEPS, project introduction Laetitia Thissen, panelists: Goran Lukić, Workers' counseling Ljubljana (Delavska svetovalnica), Slovenia, Klára Dobrev, Member of the European Parliament (EMPL), Hungary, Nino Žganec, Professor, Faculty of Law (University of Zagreb), Croatia, Sanela Čekić Bašić, Assistant Dean for international cooperation, Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Final remarks, Daša Šašić Šilović, Chair, CEE Network International Board, President The European Partners for the Environment



A CARE DEAL FOR EUROPE

- A NEW SOCIAL COMPACT -

Barcelona targets demand new legislation for their improvement . Inclusion of the gender perspective into fiscal policies.

Eastern European women especially are providing essential care work in Western Europe, often underpaid and unregulated intra-European migrant labour

The care economy may reduce the gender employment gap (predominance of women in the sector) but not the pay gap. The economic value of unpaid work amounts to 40% of GDP. Unpaid care issues have reached emergency levels.

The social dimension is cross-cutting and social welfare is a public good. It is multifaceted, e.g. concerns demographics, labour policies and migration of labour.

The transition resulted in underfinanced social care, undefined social systems, lack of capacities (both institutional and staff), a system unable to keep pace with the technological advances e.g. IT

Polls show that the young generation is i. really worried about their social rights and demanding increasingly a renewal of the social welfare state e.g. FEPS – the European Dream (joint e-discussion to hear the region).

Current EC and EP measures are welcome, the new EU Gender Strategy is a basis for action, but trade unions, progressive political parties have an enormous responsibility for shaping strategies, consulting civil society and countering populist and conservative trends.

Need to more rigorously address the role of the state vs private sector engagement in social care, especially in the area of legislation, criteria and oversight.

The EU Pillar of Social Rights is a framework and a basis to build on in terms of issues, legislation, implementation and monitoring. It is as valid for EU member states as it is for accession countries. But the latter, especially their public, lack information. Hence the importance of the FES/FEPS project and engagement of the German EU Presidency.

Recover, restart and retool –progressive and socialdemocratic politics
Roundtable III session 1 & 2 (2020 Korčula School)

Controlling the COVID-19 pandemic and the immediate healing is a priority. This is a time for the progressive, left, social-democratic forces to recoup, revisit where Europe, and South Eastern Europe, fell short in the protection of equitable socio-political systems, social justice and solidarity. Indeed, progressive and socialdemocratic principles and positions have been vindicated. This is the time to launch ambitious and bold recovery plans and guide the strategic choices we make for the “new” post-Corona order at all levels. As much as this pandemic is a catastrophe it is both a wake-up call and an unexpected, maybe catalytic, opportunity to get some things right.

How to stimulate the economy and finance the recovery? How to rehabilitate the public health sector, how to deal with unemployment and poverty, how to use this unfortunate situation to make our countries and systems more socially sensitive, gender sensitive and just? Will democracy be in peril as authoritarian leaders showing their political strong hand assume the responsibility of reassuring the population of their supreme control? Will globalization be seen as the main culprit for the spread of COVID-19. As much as this pandemic is a catastrophe it is both a wake-up call and an unexpected, maybe catalytic, opportunity to get some things right.

“Don’t allow the “good” crisis to be thrown out with the garbage! We are living in a tyranny of short term vision. It is about RESHAPE & RESKILL.”

The e-discussion especially highlighted the social dimension of the crisis (social care, health systems, education), vulnerabilities and inequalities, economic and labour challenges and policies. It was complementary to the quick response of the EC and EP, but cautious in terms of its progressive solutions. In this sense the S&D Group together with the progressives and socialdemocrats has an enormous role to play and responsibility. To further this aim cooperation with progressive and socialdemocratic parties and progressives in the region is important to avoid “slippage” in accession countries, especially in countries with autocratic regimes and a deficit in democracy.

The e-discussion was viewed by 604 viewers online

Moderator: *Nataša Milojević*, President, Fund for Socialdemocratic Initiatives (FOSDI) , CEE Network Advisory Council, Keynote Speaker: *Biljana Borzan*, Vice President S&D Group, European Parliament (SDP Croatia); Panelists: *Kalinka Gaber*, Secretary of State at the Secretariat of European Affairs North Macedonia ,CEE Network International Board , *Mikael Levi*, Secretary General SOLIDAR/SOLIDAR Foundation, *Nataša Vučković*, Secretary General Center for Democracy Foundation, Serbia. **Moderator:** *Pia Locatelli*, Honorary President, Socialist International Women, CEE Network International Board; Keynote Speaker: *Maria João Rodrigues*, President FEPS; Panelists: *Pier Virgilio Dastoli*, President European Italian Movement (Italy), *Marta Szigeti Bonifert*, Hungarian Women’s Business Association, CEE Gender Network International Board, *Lovorka Marinović*, President, Centar za Nove Inicijative (CNI), CEE Gender Network International Board, *Daša Šašić Šilović*, Chair, CEE Network International Board, President, The EPE

“WE STOPPED BEING PRAGMATIC, NOT ONLY TO ADAPT TO REALITIES, BUT TO SHAPE REALITIES. WE NEED TO BE BOLD AND TOGETHER TO BE ABLE TO WEATHER THE ERA OF SHOCKS”

Structural systemic issues in SEE have been exposed, e.g. in education many students were left behind for lack of access to IT, health care facilities while catering for the Corona patients are unable to cope with regular health needs, private facilities for the elderly are unregulated and monitored...

The EP is actively responding in formulating short term and longer term measures to address inequalities, vulnerabilities, burden that women are carrying in service industries, in health and social care, labour market and unemployment especially of women – their fundamental status. Coordination within the socialdemocratic and progressive forces is increasing. But more need to work with national parliaments.

Vaccines are a global public good with universal access. They should be available to all strata of the population. The EU social pillar should be binding. There is a need for a European health union. pact/union. The EU social Pillar should be binding. EU treaties which have shown weakness in this crisis should be modified.

This is an era of systemic shocks. The inter-dependence of countries in the region, from migrant labour, to services, trade, tourism is a call to regional cooperation and EU support. Migration has been “muted” in the pandemic but is an urgent issue.

Labour market challenges are yet to come – a decrease in stable jobs, increase in precarious and part time employment raising the issue of wages , social benefits, the consequences on the economy and the labour market as subventions dry out, changes in labour patterns with IT use and work from home....Saving jobs will be important, as well as investment in new jobs and re-skilling (EC SURE initiative).

While women need to be proactive in designing new strategies and responses, progressives and socialdemocrats need to gain power, to focus on the renewal of social dialogue and solidarity, address people’s anxieties and regain people’s confidence.

State institutions are challenged and the role of the state vs the private sector i.e. respective roles and social responsibilities have been blurred in the transition.

Recovery plan should be for all European citizens strengthening a clear concept of European citizenship. The Conference on the future of Europe should be done in a democratic process, through consultation with civil society (the agora proposal), and through a transnational debate.

Next European budget (MFF) should cover all countries, but a democratic bottom up process should determine its distribution in a democratic framework. It should be gender sensitive, empower citizens and especially women.

The discussion focuses on South Eastern Europe/regional trends, challenges and perspectives on the crisis within the current political environment in the region, especially post parliamentary elections in some countries and preparations underway for local elections. The focus was on regional economic and social policies to address the three Rs – Recovery, Restart, Retool. The perspective is that of progressive and social-democratic parties and the lens is promoting equality and equity from the perspective of gender equality.

The discussion brought out some good practice and lessons learnt from countries like North Macedonia, i.e. the positioning of the socialdemocratic party that won the elections for the second time. But it also highlighted political difficulties for the socialdemocrats in autocratic and undemocratic countries like Serbia, or in unstable countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina where the consequences of the Dayton Peace Accords and institutional functioning stifle recovery and “restarting” processes.

The importance of closer cooperation and mutual support between and among socialdemocratic parties in the region was strongly underlined. The Korčula School is considered to be an important venue for progressives and socialdemocrats to discuss these issues regionally and with other European counterparts. In a way it is “a beacon of optimism” as one participant put it.

“There is a political decision to be made by all socialdemocratic parties – do we maintain the status quo when we come to power or should we challenge the status quo? How pragmatic but bold can we be.”

“Our ideas have become buzzwords – let’s not underestimate our electorate”.

The session was viewed by 313 viewers.

Moderator: *Tamara Tripić*, Member CEE Network International Board; Keynote: *Radmila Šekerinska*, Minister of Defense, North Macedonia (SDUM); Panelists: *Teuta Vodo*, Secretary International, SDP Albania/Executive Director FQS, *Ranko Krivokapić*, MP, former Speaker of Parliament and President SDP Montenegro, *Dragan Šutanovac*, President, Council for Strategic Policy Serbia, former Minister of Defense and President of the Democratic Party (Serbia), *Evin Incir*, MEP S&D Group in the European Parliament, Sweden, *Mojca Kleva Kekus*, President “Progresiva” Slovenia, CEE Network Board member

“YOU CAN BE PROGRESSIVE AND WIN”

Political choices will be crucial for countries to come out of the crisis – but it is about investments in people and their wellbeing and not in new armaments. But it needs the political wisdom, maturity, compromise, transparency on behalf of the political elites, which is lacking.

Regional interdependency is at its height in these moments. There is no alternative to regional cooperation but in the broader European context. Gender equality has to be part of the recovery package and the EU Gender Strategy can provide guidance. Short term measures out of the crisis are not a solution, but in the regional context it should be an issue of regional cooperation. Progressive and socialdemocratic parties have a lot to do in charting a long term vision.

The fact that there is no war in the Balkans has not automatically translated into peace, nor into development. Internationalism and solidarity has been lost. Socialdemocratic parties need closer cooperation and mutual support in the region in a more organized and regular way.

Progressive and socialdemocratic parties should not underestimate their voters. Being complacent, not addressing people’s anxieties

Regional relations are still to be marred by “emotions” and not pragmatism, solidarity and good neighbourly relations. Unfortunately, it seems that regional integration is at the mercy of outside forces (EU, NATO, US, Russia, China etc.) and not our priority. But citizens are pragmatic, they travel I the region, trade, build bridges, while we use “man made” animosities to prevail for ulterior political ends of populist regimes..

In un-democratic and authoritarian systems it is not easy to find people who are ready to work for change. But they often lack leadership that is open, transparent and ready to listen. People in these times need hope... Can we focus on messaging and communication through clear political positions and those that address people’s fears and every day concerns?

The challenge confronting socialdemocrats – need to substantively review the role of socialdemocracy and the left in a closed financially driven world. Are we really decision makers and how much do we influence decision making? What do we want in this new era? Can we be proactive and not reactive?

Support from socialdemocrats and progressive from the EU, especially from the S&D Group and progressive/socialdemocratic MPs in the region, is important. Activities of SD foundations in the region are providing important support. These are complex times, demanding multifaceted cooperation, knowledge, skills, call to action.



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