2024 KORČULA "SCHOOL" THINK TANK

CEE Gender Network - Videos

– Transforming Politics through a Gender Lens-

30 (Friday) – 31 (Saturday) August 2024

Centar za kulturu Korčula, Korčula town[1] - Hybrid (in person/ZOOM)

CEE GENDER NETWORK AT THIRTY

–celebrating achievements, addressing challenges, moving forward together -

"My mind is pessimistic , but my will is optimistic", Antonio Gramsci 

R E P O R T

https://youtu.be/VcCSYu4BcCw

https://youtu.be/RKfwp-Lx-yk

Introduction

The Korčula School Think Tank (https://ceegendernetwork.eu) gathers women and men political and civil society leaders, socialdemocrats and progressives, from South Eastern Europe/Western Balkans and Europe. The objective is to discuss the political, economic, social, and cultural situation in the region, challenges, and responses within the broader context of social democratic and progressive politics. The event is an opportunity for an open exchange of information, ideas and opinions as well as to forge partnerships and promote mutual understanding and cooperation. Gender equality lens is applied in all the discussions.

Issues relating to the EU accession processes of the countries in the region remain high on the agenda as the countries battle with rising authoritarianism, unabated nationalism, unbridled economic liberalism and corruption and rising poverty as social systems (health, education, social transfers) keep failing. The

[1] https://kulturakorcula.hr

media and other propaganda tools are tightly controlled in some countries by the authoritarian and right-wing governments and the culture of violence, including that against women, is a prevalent social malady. Within that, gender equality remains a litmus test for the state of democracy, human rights, and social justice and is mainstreamed as a political and ideological issue throughout the discussions.

The think tank, which is held annually (this is its **thirteenth session)**, has become a recognized political forum due to its innovative, open, progressive, substantive political discussions and a gender disaggregated approach to equality, democracy, human rights, social justice, and overall transformative politics. It fosters a free, open, and substantive debate among participants. The Korčula think tank is also an opportunity for networking, alliance building and mutual empowerment through cooperation.

The 2024 Korčula School think tank was also an occasion **to celebrate thirty years** of the CEE Network for Gender Issues, its challenges, achievements, activities, and strategies looking forward. The program was conducted with moderators, introduction speakers, respondents/discussants to allow an open, interactive format and a free-flowing discussion with the engagement of all participants. The meeting is recorded**.** The sessions are in English with Croatian interpretation. The 2024 Korčula think tank was organized in cooperation with the Olof Palme International Center, the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity (EFDS) and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung which presented its regional study on youth. The Foundation for European Progressive Studies organized a back-to-back fringe event on the social dimension of EU enlargement: past shortcoming and future potentials.

Prior to the official programme a closed meeting of present political leaders from the region was organized. Special Regional Dialogue over Coffee (roundtable format) focused on regional challenges and strengthening regional political cooperation among socialdemocratic parties. It was followed by a closed meeting with EU focusing on cooperation and coordination in the new political setting after the EU elections especially in terms of joint vision and action. The participants paid homage with a minute of silence for Predrag Fred Matić, Croatian MEP who has greatly supported gender equality in the European Parliament.

https://youtu.be/P-kAh9Izp9w

Key take aways

The thirteenth annual Korčula School, focused on left-progressive and social democratic policies, particularly gender equality, successfully concluded its mission. Seventy-five high-ranking social democratic politicians from across Europe and the Western Balkans critically reflected on the current political landscape. The situation is far from optimistic: social democrats are not performing well in elections, and gender equality has become a significant point of contention between the right and the left. While the left cautiously steps back, human rights continue to be violated. Democratic achievements, such as women's rights and the fight against corruption, are under threat as authoritarian regimes and neoliberal economic forces clash. In that situation the Korčula School is a place for argumental political and ideological discussions and thus of interest to all social-democratic European families and institutions.

In just two days, a wide range of topics were discussed at a rapid pace. Through the lens of gender politics, participants gained significant insights. One key takeaway was the need for leftist parties to actively engage in discussions on gender equality, both as a counter to ideological push back from the right and to tactically redefine their strategy to promote the feminist agenda and the gender equality concept.

Inspired by Antonio Gramsci's slogan, "My mind is pessimistic, but my will is optimistic," social democrats from the region unanimously agreed that the further erosion of human rights—particularly women's rights—along with democracy and the welfare state, must not be permitted. The consequences of inaction will be borne by future generations, whether through the repayment of corrupt loans or in the form of a deteriorated social environment. In this context, social democratic policies were carefully examined, and future cooperation was outlined.

The restructuring efforts following the European parliamentary elections lack a clear roadmap, with no definitive timeline for when Western Balkan countries will join the EU. Meanwhile, violence against women, including femicide, is on the rise, and reproductive rights are being consistently undermined.

The situation is far from encouraging. Social democrats are struggling in elections, and gender equality has become a battleground, with the right challenging the left. Human rights are being violated, and the democratic achievements of modern Europe, particularly women's rights, are under threat. Corruption, often linked with authoritarian regimes and unrestrained neoliberal economic policies, continues to rise. Amid the restructuring and reorganization following the European parliamentary elections, there is no clear path forward. Rhetorical promises abound, but there is no definitive timeline for Western Balkan countries to join the EU. Meanwhile, violence against women, including femicide, is increasing, and reproductive rights are being eroded daily.

Gender equality is under attack from right-wing political movements worldwide, including in the Eastern Balkans. The CEE Gender Network has frequently addressed this issue, examining gender equality and gender integration through a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach, particularly in the face of political regression. Poland and Hungary are leading the charge against women's rights and gender equality. In Croatia, the center-right is pushing for withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention on Violence Against Women. At the same time, femicide and violence against women are on the rise, the gender pay gap persists, and religious and patriarchal values are becoming more entrenched. Social democratic parties are still grappling with implementing the quota systems.

Each topic was approached through the lens of gender, including "Sexual Harassment in the Workplace," which is a critical issue not only for social development but with economic implications. The project financed by the EU and done in cooperation with several civil society organizations from Greece, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Italy, Belgium, and Spain calls for re-educating society and raising awareness. The CEE Gender Network collaborates with the Office of the Ombudsman for Gender Equality in Croatia and it is rolled out with the participation of Croatian national TV station (HRT), chambers of commerce, employers, and trade unions. The response is overwhelmingly positive.

1. **Roundtable - "Socialdemocracy 3.0 – between pessimism and optimism"**

https://youtu.be/Xosol1IM0a0

General Issues

1.1. The discussion built on the panel that was started last year but in different circumstances stemming from the European elections, where the social democrats retained most of their seats, even though the Parliament overall turned to the right - 7 of the 9 seats that the social democrats lost were from Eastern Europe. This highlights the need for strengthening political work in and with the region in building a more robust socialdemocratic response, including in the analysis of joint weaknesses, present elitism but also in addressing the ways and means to ensure both

economic and social EU integration. In this context fighting against the backlash on gender equality should be a priority ideological issue.

1.2. The Korčula School is moving in the direction of overcoming just a discussion forum and more strongly discussing joint cooperation and activities. One of the reasons for its success is that it engages many organisations and the attitude is not paternalistic but rather a peer-to-peer relationship. The closed regional meeting ended up with a plan for 2025. In that sense, mutual political assistance and political "schools" are important to empower politicians.

1.3. Socialdemocrats should make clear that EU enlargement is also a moral imperative. Moreover, in the current international political situation, characterized by the Russian attack on Ukraine, the war in the Middle East, tensions in the Balkans, international interference of China and Russia, and also weapons of mass destruction owned by a handful of countries, the need for proactive international cooperation between progressives and social democrats, is most pressing. What is the answer for the future – sticking to socialdemocratic values and never giving up on equality, solidarity and cooperation.

That is what social democracy 3.0. is about. Social democrats should stress that development is always a win-win situation. It is only better if more and more people can empower and develop to participate in democracy. Many young people do not want to join politics, because they think all politicians and parties are the same and that they are there out of self-interest – a perception that socialdemocrats should take seriously and design a toolkit how to address this challenge. Croatia has experienced a significant decrease in its population as young people opt to leave for the other EU countries, and in Serbia according to the FOSDI poll 1 in 37 young people want to leave the country. At the same time regional mobility, especially among seasonal workers has steadily increased, but a shortage of the labor force in the region is worrisome.

1.4. It is to be expected that the approach regarding enlargement is going to change, both because of the war and because the doctrine of how to go about enlargement is changing. Socialdemocrats have to be more active in shaping the process of enlargement not only within the EU member states, but also in the region.

1.5. The S&D group and PES did their utmost for the last EP election. Currently, only 35% in the European Parliament are women, and this is a problem. Not only is this number too low, but men are also more likely to nominate other men for prominent positions.

1.6. Socialdemocrats can achieve the main ingredients of their DNA - aspirations of equality, solidarity, empowerment, protection and dignity. This should today also include the concept of sustainability. Conservatives and the far right today actively undermine these values.Moreover, the understanding of democracy must evolve to be more inclusive, addressing everyone's needs and concerns. There is still a lot of work to be done, such as improving working and living conditions, tackling climate change, and adapting to the digital transformation of society. To meet these challenges, socialdemocratic programs need to be updated continuously and find ways to effectively reach out to people by way of inclusive communication.

1.7. It should be noted that young people, seemingly indifferent, do care about politics on key existential issues. They are not necessarily ready to join political parties but are more issue oriented e.g. climate change, working and living conditions like housing, development of local communities. However, in their activities with young people in the region socialdemocrats must clearly spell out the reasons for joining the EU and equally argue that EU integration is not at the expense of national identity and sovereignty as they are intoxicated with this argumentation by the right. Political education and training should not be thematically regionally restricted but geared at providing young people a broader, worldly view of politics, geo-politics, social and

economic solutions and lessons especially in a situation where national education systems are poor especially in terms of civic education, history (perception of the world) and social sciences. Role models and mentors are important to engage young people in politics.

1.8. The challenge for socialdemocrats and progressives in this international environment and the new European Commission will be to make sure that new budget allocations for security and armament are not done at the expense of social, economic and the "green" commitments. Additionally, empowerment and protection cannot be limited to local and national levels; it must be addressed at the EU level.

1.9. The Social Democrats in Sweden narrowly lost the parliamentary elections by a margin of just 0.3% and the fact that the liberals started collaborating with the extreme right. This troubling development is not limited to Sweden; it is also occurring in other countries, such as the Netherlands. Many believed that the extreme right would act responsibly if given power, but this was not the case. Instead, their first actions were to dismantle feminist policies and those concerning climate and security.

In response, SDPSweden formed 11 work groups with a new generation. They had two tasks: 1. Analyze the current political situation. 2. Write 200 concrete proposals for what the Social Demo crats should do in the future. The three questions were focusing on one proposal - to reduce working hours from 40 to 35 hours a week. According to the right, this would make Sweden a 3rd world country. Migration and integration was the most dominant topic in all 200 proposals. One proposal was that immigrants should be spread out, rather than all being put together to create more diverse environments. A third proposal was centered around the question how to reach out to young men, because many of them left and joined the extreme right. There are voices even in socialdemocratic circles advocating for less advocacy around feminism which seems to have alienated many including in the Western Balkans where the concept of gender equality is under severe right-wing attack.

1.10. Elections are won by focusing on future plans, rather than past achievements meaning that parties can also be revived through forward looking policies rather than electoral losses. But the simplest recipe for solving problems is admitting that there is a problem and also facing it. The need for Social Democracy 3.0 shows that there is a problem of analysis and self-criticism to face inadequate policies and electoral failure. This also means constantly upgrading policies and action and learning from them, as well as not disregarding the party structures when in government and promoting internal party democracy. But this also means addressing peoples' concerns in a constantly changing political, economic and social environment which can best be done at local level. Embracing change and addressing its challenges needs a proactive perspective, a space that is often taken by the right, and today the far right. Asking questions is not enough but providing answers…

1.11. The region especially faces a specific threat: authoritarian regimes and the far-right, who manipulate the truth using their majority or the media. This should unite and inspire progressives and socialdemocrats to reach a consensus by reaffirming and reclaiming social democratic values and adapting them to the current economic situation. But it is interesting that when the NDI conducted polls in which respondents were asked whether they would rather have a democracy or a good quality of life with no democracy. The majority chose the second option. This is very concerning and proves that policies which stimulate transparency are needed to create more trust in democracy and full political and civic equality. People do not see their

potential to change the order of things and they are disappointed, so they resort both to apathy and also anger at the current state of affairs.

1.12. With the very slow and indefinite EU integration, and trends within the EU socialdemocratis in the region feel that the Western Balkan is an "isolated" part of Europe, where they are abandoned to be victims of transactional policies. Autocrats are selling their countries to the highest bidder (including the EU), making it impossible to comply with the requirements for EU membership. They have rigged the elections and corrupted the system, while the media are in their pockets. This is what social democrats must resist here.

1.13. But how can this be done? By strengthening country and regional cooperation among progressive political parties and NGO's, fighting against the popular belief that all political parties, on the left and the right, are the same and that socialdemocracy is outdated, by addressing social injustices, lack of the rule of law and inequality. The EU candidate countries, irrespective of the accession process, should have a voice in the EU and EP institutions even without a right to vote yet.

1.14. The challenge is how to win back voters but also to open up socialdemocratic parties to its members. But reaching out to communities, and especially with the young people, on concrete issues such as climate change, security, being tough on crime and corruption, to learn how to work with the voters when socialdemocrats are not in government. In Tirana, for example, the social democrats have a 50/50 policy where men and women candidates always follow each other for elections of the city council. 30% of the council members are under 30. In this way, the city council can propose policies for both genders and aimed at young people.

1.15. The focus should be on addressing everyone's needs and concerns with a constant upgrade of programmes, strengthen inclusiveness in party politics and outreach to the electorate and the media. There is still much work
to be done, such as improving working and living conditions, housing,
solving climate change, and adapting to the digital transformation of society.

2. "Gender equality politics – addressing the ideological backlash and responding to the feminist agenda"

https://youtu.be/0XoudccZvRI

2.1. The concept of gender equality is under attack from right wing political circles, throughout the world. It is also so in the Eastern Balkans. How can socialdemocratic and progressive political forces, women and men, address this backlash? The CEE Gender Network has numerous times addressed the issue of gender equality and gender mainstreaming through a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary perspective, as well as the gradual political backsliding. Poland and Hungary are leading the assault on the human rights of women and gender equality, in Croatia the center right is asking for the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention on Violence against Women, femicide and violence against women are on the raise, the gender pay gap persists, religious and patriarchal values are even more pronounced, and the political quota systems in socialdemocratic parties still vie for implementation. This session was organized in cooperation with S-Kvinnor of Sweden and will be also an opportunity for an exchange of views and strategies on how to address this trend.

2.2. There is gradual political backsliding, or push back, regarding gender equality, e.g. in Poland, even with the new government, in Hungary where women's rights and gender equality are particularly threatened and in Croatia with the "praying and kneeling" manifestations against the

gender concept with religious connotations. While there are political demands in the Croatian Parliament to de-ratify the Istanbul Convention on Violence against Women, Hungary itself has not even ratified it. Today, the Istanbul Convention is becoming the litmus test for the situation and views on gender equality. Femicide and violence against women are on the rise. The gender pay gap persists. And the religious and patriarchal values are strengthening. The media does its own bit in projecting a patriarchal and macho perspective. After the 2024 European Parliamentary elections with the rise of the far-right populist influence this situation will be very challenging, even with the increase of women supporting this political option which demands scrutiny.

2.3. The study conducted in Hungary and Serbia on the populist and right-wing influence on the gender equality concept is a starting point, demanding a more in-depth country and regional analysis. It has unearthed a diversity of views, from rural/urban, levels of education to generational/demographic differences. The study also examined the legal and institutional frameworks, which change from government to government, often for the worse. For example, in Hungary, gender issues are now relegated to a government department with a particular focus on reproductive rights, with constant manipulation equating gender equality with the LGBTQ issue to cause confusion. A similar situation arose in North Macedonia when some social democrats, during the discussion on the gender equality law, joined the church as they could not differentiate between the gender concept and the LGBTQ issue.

2.4. Feminism has a negative connotation throughout the region, not only in Hungary. Much of that narrative is imported from the USA. Birthrates are not increasing in Hungary, and childcare is primarily relegated to the local government level. What is gender policy and gender mainstreaming from a multidisciplinary perspective? The concept demands better articulation for people to understand.

2.5. While gender equality issues are similar in Serbia to those in Hungary, especially in terms of the political atmosphere and the authoritarian regime, there are marked differences. The study demands a more in-depth analysis into the root causes of regressive processes1. The Serbian government uses more sophisticated methods to push the regressive agenda. Despite having solid gender legislation and some popular measures for families or young mothers, implementation, enforcement, and results are lacking, especially in terms of monitoring and evaluation1. For example, little has been done to implement the Istanbul Convention, which perpetuates violence against women and femicide. In the past 12 years, 406 women have been killed by their male partners.

2.6. The right uses “gender washing” (using women as political and ideological objects) as a façade, projecting a gender-sensitive image for political gains but without substance. President Vučić in Serbia has appointed women to many decision-making positions, but this has not impacted gender equality. For example, the Prime Minister was a woman and a lesbian who adopted a son in France because Serbian legislation does not allow same-sex marriages and adoption. She did nothing to change the legislation. It also seems that right-oriented civil society organizations perform well and are more successful than other organizations and groups.

2.7. The interviews with a diverse group of stakeholders revealed that in Serbia, opposition forces of the socialdemocratic group did not effectively affirm the gender concept. There has not been enough action to empower the electorate, especially women voters, in creating and deciding on their own political options. Perhaps a more rational, argument-based approach should be linked to addressing the emotional aspect beyond the bare political. So, the question remains: what motivates women voters, what is necessary to improve their social and political empowerment and profile?

2.8. Since 2016, SDP Croatia has been in opposition, limiting its potential to change legislation. However, it often lacks clarity in its policies, making it difficult to reach out to the population. Under this right-wing government, gender equality and the status of women are in jeopardy. The right not only wants to de-ratify the Istanbul Convention, but their programme also includes a proposal to pay women to stay at home to address the "demographic" situation in Croatia. Women in political positions are often ridiculed, attacked by the media with fake news, and harassed. Fifteen years after the establishment of the ombudswoman for gender equality office in Croatia, the ombudswoman is constantly threatened with her life for advocating for this agenda.

2.9. On social media and TikTok, the concept and image of "soft girls" (advocating for young women to stay out of the paid labor market and be housewives) is trending. It is pertinent to ask whether young women are overburdened by multiple pressures to perform personally and professionally. Perhaps this is the time for self-reflection on what has been achieved with gender equality policies and how they correspond to current political, ideological, and social trends, as well as the choices made by an electorate increasingly opting for the right.

2.10. Since the Social Democrats are not in government in Sweden now, there is a dismantling of social services and progressive gender equality policies that mainly benefit women. Fortunately, the conservatives are still in the liberal category, so issues of reproductive rights are not affected as they are in Poland and Hungary. During the Social Democratic government, the wage gap decreased for 15 consecutive years. However, in the three years that right-wing conservatives have been in government, the wage gap between men and women has increased again. The unemployment rate has also risen, with women losing out in more women-oriented sectors, and household incomes are decreasing.

2.11. While the Social Democrats took measures to decrease violence against women by focusing on men and police measures, the new conservative government instructed the police authorities to remove almost all assignments that concern men's violence against women.

2.12. Male violence against women should not be treated as a relationship breakdown but as a crime, a criminal offense that must have allocated resources like other crimes such as gang crime. After 17 years, Sweden's municipalities no longer receive development funds for working with women's rights initiatives, and funding to civil society organizations focused on women has decreased. One of the first things the new government did was to remove the feminist foreign policy and cut back on international aid. Welfare services are underfunded. As a side note, the government's tax reduction on petrol was almost as high as the entire general allocation of funds to regions responsible for schools, healthcare, and elderly care. The hope is for the Social Democrats to return to government in 2026 and reverse these negative trends.

2.13. General education in the region is weak and unable to address civic issues. The opposition falls short of addressing the changing labor market and the lack of understanding between the young and the old in politics. However, proper civic education could change young people's attitudes. In Croatia, after a public discussion, only three cities have introduced civic education into the curriculum. Secular state constitutions are not respected when it comes to Church positions (whether Catholic or Orthodox), and no one dares to raise these issues, including the socialdemocrats, e.g., the use of the cross in state-run school classrooms. The anti-democratic processes in the region have resulted in a poor general education system, and today it is very difficult to reverse this situation. It is only dealing with the consequences.

2.14. The left has not been firm on its values and as a result has lost trust in the electorate because of political vacillations. Socialdemocratic parties in view of this need to focus on peace, human security, climate change and the environment, housing, health and childcare, better pay and better working conditions, socially meaningful work for both men and women, and of course,

equal position of men and women in politics. Taking the political initiative, and not being reactive to the aggressiveness of the right, should lead into concrete action and could lead to electoral success. Internally, socialdemocratic parties need to work with their own members in motivating them by explaining the party policies in an "understandable" way e.g. on the gender concept, so that they can in turn take it to the campaign.

2.15. The left has not been firm on its values, resulting in a loss of trust among the electorate due to political vacillations. Social democratic parties, in view of this, need to focus on peace, human security, climate change and the environment, housing, health and childcare, better pay and working conditions, socially meaningful work for both men and women, and, of course, equal positions for men and women in politics. Taking the political initiative, rather than reacting to the aggressiveness of the right, should lead to concrete action and could result in electoral success. Internally, social democratic parties need to work with their own members, motivating them by explaining party policies in an understandable way, such as on the gender concept, so that they can, in turn, take it to the campaign. Maybe the concept of gender equality should be tackled by the motto apparently attributed to Albert Einstein: "If you can explain it to a six year, 6 year old, you don't understand it yourself."

3. "Population Culture – multidisciplinary approach"

https://youtu.be/F9507iRlQCU

3.1. Within the complex of women's human rights and gender equality, the issues of reproductive rights, right to abortion, sexual freedoms and population policies are part and parcel of the above mentioned "backlash" and backsliding on women's rights. The CEE Gender Network and its partners have launched a discussion on these issues through a multidisciplinary approach and based on a research paper done in Serbia by the Network partner FOSDI.

3.2. There should not just be financial allowances; a more multidisciplinary approach is needed. Women in rural areas need education on their health and healthcare, and more support should be given to those working in elderly care and with pregnant women. Population demographic measures need to be reconsidered and updated in line with people's needs, and information and awareness-raising should continue. Local communities must inform their citizens about their rights and obligations. We need not only financial aid to promote motherhood but also changes in the environment, such as supporting caregivers who work in hospitals. The age for women to receive reproductive help, like IVF and assisted pregnancy, has been raised to 45 years, and they face a lot of scrutiny from social media. All of these factors contribute to an aging society.Due to economic and housing constraints many generations live within one household. Government institutions are functioning poorly to support young families, and very often the younger generation provides for the pensioners who then repay them in kind by taking care of the children and house chores. Many young people opt for emigrating because there are limited job opportunities, nepotism is the norm.

3.3. All these factors contribute to an aging society:

- alleviating the economic costs of raising a child through financial aid. In Serbia the amount of aid has increased substantially since 2008, but these measures (women in Croatia have been critical of them) are short term and short lived
- balancing work and parenthood are a huge problem especially when childcare facilities are turned into private hands at a greater cost
- reducing the psychological cost of parenthood (during the focus groups the students had a lot to say about this, they wanted to work with the children and not the parents)
- preservation and improvement of reproductive health

- solving infertility problems
- towards healthy motherhood
- population education
- activation of local self-government.

3.4. Croatia has the lowest fertility rate in the EU as the reproduction rate has decreased after it has joined the Union. Women face discrimination in the age groups 25-30 and 50-55, being considered either too young to get promoted or too old to keep their jobs, leading to downgrades to lower-paid positions. Many women in the 55-65 age group opt for early retirement to help their children, who often have 3-4 children themselves, due to a lack of support from public institutions, thus becoming stay-at-home grandmothers. Despite their contributions to society and having many children, these women are not rewarded accordingly. To help balance private and business lives, women want to be given more help from public institutions!

3.5. Women have different perspectives on these issues than men. A multidisciplinary approach is necessary to the issue of population and demographics, basically gender based policies. The labor market is also changing demanding adjustments to female, male and family work. Equally, budgets should accommodate for reproductive health, counselling services and address the balance between work and private life through synergetic action by the state and public actors. Special support is lacking for rural women in terms of their employment, working conditions, personal advancement.

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Presentation of two projects

1. **Presentation of the CEE Gender Network project on sexual harassment**

https://youtu.be/SBg0-QtRcuM

2. **Presentation: FES Youth Study Southeast Europe 2024**

https://youtu.be/P-kAh9Izp9w

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"Our thirty years – gender politics, consistency and perseverance" – CEE Network

30-year celebration video

https://youtu.be/RKfwp-Lx-yk

Annex 1 - Programme

2024 KORČULA "SCHOOL" THINK TANK

– *Transforming Politics through a Gender Lens*-

P R O G R A M M E

Draft/Speakers tbc

CEE GENDER NETWORK AT THIRTY

–celebrating achievements, addressing challenges, moving forward together -

"My mind is pessimistic , but my will is optimistic", Antonio Gramsci 

30 (Friday) – 31 (Saturday) August 2024

Centar za kulturu Korčula[2] , Korčula town - Hybrid (in person/ZOOM)[i]

The 2024 Korčula Think Tank will consist of two blocks:

i. **Friday, 30 August** pre-event with two closed sessions: i. a high-level discussion among progressive and socialdemocratic leading politicians, civil society leaders and prominent intellectuals on the current situation in the region, strategies looking forward and regional cooperation among them; ii. a dialogue among regional and EU progressive and socialdemocratic leading politicians, civil society leaders and prominent intellectuals to discuss the political situation and strategies.
In the afternoon there will be a continuation of the discussion from the 2023 Korčula School on socialdemocracy (socialdemocracy 3.0), followed by a celebration of the CEE Gender Network's thirtieth anniversary.

ii. **Saturday, 31st August** will start with a session on gender equality and feminism and "the backlash" since the concept of gender, reproductive rights, sexual freedoms, the population culture, and the Istanbul Convention on Violence against Women have become key political and ideological issues in public discourse and many elections by the political right in 2024. It will be conducted by women's forums in the region and the Swedish S-Kvinnor women's organisation. The following session will address the "Population culture". The 2024 Korčula School ends with the presentation of the CEE Gender Network project on sexual harassment in Croatia.

All sessions will implement the gender equality "lens".

[2] Centar za kulturu Korčula – kultura korcula – https://kulturakorcula.hr

2 Antonio Gramsci, Letters from Prison, selected and translated by Lynn Lawner, New York: Harper and Row, 1973, p. 159.

THURSDAY, 29 August 2024	
Arrival of participants	
FRIDAY, 30 August 2024	
13:00-14:00	**Light lunch** (Centar za kulturu Korčula)
14:04-14:15	**Opening** ***Bjorn von Sydow***, *President, European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity* ***Daša Šašić Šilović***, *Chair, CEE Gender Network, President European Partners for the Environment*
14:15-16:00	**Roundtable - "Socialdemocracy 3.0 – between pessimism and optimism"**[3] The session on "Socialdemocracy 3.0" is a continuation of the discussion at the 2023 Korčula School, as well the above two previous sessions and will be conducted in a roundtable format. It also comes after a number of elections in the region of SEE, that resulted in non-satisfactory electoral performance of the SD parties and further decreased the influence of SD in the national politics in their respective countries. It also comes after the EU elections, hence the opportunity to review the situation and discuss strategies and the way forward. Is this backlash merely ideological or political, is it also moral and value based, is this a reflection of social angst, sense of insecurity in a fast changing and often chaotic world, lack of trust in politics and lack of solidarity? Are these concerns gender neutral? Polls show that women tend to be more progressive than men, especially among the youth. Is this a coincidence? The inherent challenges and threats to peace and stability go beyond business as usual demanding geopolitical, European and regional responses. Authoritarian, conservative politics is that of the 'family, faith and flag' and of seemingly 'restoring order'. The situation in the Western Balkans is a testimony to its detrimental effects. How not to agonize but to organize? What are progressive and socialdemocratic responses? **Keynote remarks (3-5 minutes each):** • **Stefan Löfven,** President PES (topic European elections – lessons learnt and strategy forward (ZOOM) • **Borislav Stefanović**, MP Serbia and Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Serbian Parliament, Vice President Party of Freedom and Justice, Serbia **Video messages:** • **Edi Rama**, Prime Minister of Albania, President SP Albania (Video) • **Zoran Milanović**, President Republic of Croatia (video tbc) • **Zoran Zaev,** former President of SDSM and Prime Minister of North Macedonia (Video) **Interactive debate (3 minutes each)** • **Venko Filipče**, President, SDSM, North Macedonia • **Maria João Rodrigues,** President FEPS • **Erion Veliaj,** Mayor of Tirana • **Ivan Vujović,** President SDP Montenegro • **Ann Linde,** former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden • **Saša Magazinović,** Member of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina • **Kata Tűttő**, Deputy-Mayor of Budapest, Member of the European Committee of the Regions, MSZP Hungary • **Matjaž Nemc,** Vice President, SD Slovenia, MEP (ZOOM)

[3] Follow-up on discussion from 2023 Korčula School

	Open Discussion: Presidents and social democratic leading politicians **Moderators:** • **Ranko Krivokapić,** former President of Parliament and former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro • **Pia Locatelli,** International Secretary PSI, Italy, Member CEE Gender Network Board
16:00-16:45	**"Our thirty years – gender politics, consistency and perseverance" – CEE Network for Gender Issues** The Central and Eastern European Network for Gender Issues (CEE Gender Network) founded in 1994 within the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity is a coalition of women's organization, foundations and groups from social democratic, left and progressive political parties and civil society organizations in Central Europe, especially the Western Balkans. Its mission is to promote the empowerment of women and gender equality objectives into mainstream strategies, policies and programs of centre-left, progressive and social democratic political parties. In 2024 the CEE Gender Network is also marking the thirteenth anniversary of its flagship think tank the "Korčula School – Transforming Politics through a Gender Lens" which is designed to be an unique political ideological, free thinking space for dialogue on critical ideological and political issues focusing on gender equality. The Network is associate member of the PES, member of PESW, observer member of the FEPS and strategic partner of SOLIDAR. It is EU Ambassador for the EU Pillar on Social Rights. Its Chair was awarded the 2020 Silver Rose award by SOLIDAR and the S&D Group in the European Parliament. The CEE Gender Network is also partner in several EU gender related projects. **Keynote speeches:** 1. **Dasa Šašić Šilović,** Chair CEE Network for Gender Issues, President European Partners for the Environment 2. **Heinz Fischer,** former President of Austria and first President of the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity (Video) 3. **Lena Hjelm Wallen,** former Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sweden and former President of EFDS 4. **Björn von Sidow,** former Defence Minister Sweden and President of EFDS 5. **Margot Wallström,** former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden, President Olof Palme International Center (Video) **30 year celebration video**
19:00	Sightseeing - town of Korčula (optional)
20:00	Dinner Reception

SATURDAY, 31 August 2024

2024 KORČULA "SCHOOL" THINK TANK

Gender equality at the heart of the political debate

9:30- 11:00	**"Gender equality politics – addressing the ideological backlash and responding to the feminist agenda"** The session is partnered with S-Kvinnor of Sweden **Keynote Message:** • **Tanja Fajon,** Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovenia, former President SD (Video) **Introductory Remarks (5 minutes each):** • **Andrasz Pulai,** Director of Strategy, Publicus Research, Hungary • **Tamara Tripić,** Member of CEE Gender Network Board and President Network for Democratic Dialogue Serbia

	• **Nina Űnesi**, President S-Kvinnor, Sweden **Interactive Debate (3 minutes each):** • **Sonja Lokar,** former Executive Director, CEE Gender Network (ZOOM) • **Martina Naumovska,** Secretary General SDSM North Macedonia • **Sonja Kovač,** Vice-President PESW, SDP Croatia • **Dragana Rašić Jovanović,** President WF Democratic Party of Serbia • **Lena Ag,** a founding Board member, CEE Gender Network **Open discussion** **Moderator: Zita Gurmai**, President PESW, MP Hungary, CEE Gender Network, Board Member
The concept of gender equality is under attack from right wing political circles, throughout the world. It is also so in the Eastern Balkans. How can socialdemocratic and progressive political forces, women and men, address this backlash? The CEE Gender Network has numerous times addressed the issue of gender equality and gender mainstreaming through a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary perspective, as well as the gradual political backsliding. Poland and Hungary are leading the assault on the human rights of women and gender equality, in Croatia the centre right is asking for the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention on Violence against Women, femicide and violence against women are on the raise, the gender pay gap persists, religious and patriarchal values are even more pronounced, and the political quota systems in socialdemocratic parties still vie for implementation. This session is organised in cooperation with S-Kvinnor of Sweden and will be also an opportunity for an exchange of views and strategies on how to address this trend.	
11:00- 11:30	Coffee
11:30 – 12:30	**“Population Culture – multidisciplinary approach”** **Presentation:** 1. **Nataša Milojević**, President FOSDI Serbia and Member CEE Gender Network Advisory Council **Discussants:** 1. **Višnja Ljubičić**, Ombudswoman for Gender Equality, Croatia 2. **Brankica Janković,** Commissioner for Equality, Serbia **Moderator: Marta Szigeti Bonifert,** CEE Gender Network Board member, Board Member, European Partners for the Environment
Within the complex of women’s human rights and gender equality, the issues of reproductive rights, right to abortion, sexual freedoms and population policies are part and parcel of the above mentioned “backlash” and backsliding on women’s rights. The CEE Gender Network and its partners have launched a discussion on these issues through a multidisciplinary approach which will be presented at the 2024 Korčula School and based on a research paper done in Serbia by the Network partner FOSDI.	
12:30 – 13:30	Light lunch
13:30 – 14:45	**Presentation of the CEE Gender Network project on sexual harassment** **Lovorka Marinović,** President CNI and Member CEE Gender Network Board **Video projection** **Discussants:** 1. **Nebojša Paunović**, Adviser, Office of the Ombudsperson, Croatia 2. **Radojka Kraljević**, Professor, Libertas University Zagreb **3. Danijela Stanojević**, Communication Manager, CEE Gender Network
The CEE Gender Network is a partner of a number of civil society organisations from Greece, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Italy, Belgium and Spain on a joint project on sexual harassment. The Network has conducted a series of training workshops, in cooperation with the Office of the Croatian Ombudsperson for Gender Equality which have included the participation of the main Croatian TV station (HRT), chambers of commerce and employers and trade unions**.** The response has been very positive with a demand for the continuation of the project.	
14:45– 15:30	**Presentation: FES Youth Study Southeast Europe 2024** **Presentation: Emina Adilović,** Senior Researcher Associate, Faculty of Political Science, University of Sarajevo **Discussants:** **1. Ana Pirtskhalava,** Policy Adviser PESW

	2. **Jure Zubčić,** SDP Croatia
15:30-15:45	**Conclusion**
16:00-17:30	**FEPS Fringe event "The Social Dimension of Enlargement: past shortcoming and future potentials"**

Enlargement policy is widely considered one of the most successful expressions of EU foreign policy. The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the consequent membership applications of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia have strongly relaunched the process and given new momentum to the Western Balkans' accession as well. Important steps have been carried out in the last couple of years and a potential accession date – 2030 – has also been suggested.

In spite of this, the Western Balkan countries' journey towards the EU remains slow and full of obstacles – both at national and EU levels. When discussing enlargement, however, there is an aspect that consistently receives less attention: the social change that the accession process should deliver to the candidate countries. Preparing to become an EU member state should not just be about economic and institutional adjustments. Citizens are, at the end of the day, those who should benefit from the reforms implemented in the member states. Yet, what they are experiencing right now is democratic backsliding, massive emigration and increased inequalities.

In this workshop, we will discuss how to ensure that the process results, in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights, in strengthened social rights and protection, in inclusive labour markets and economic growth and in the empowerment of the WB citizens.

In cooperation with the Foundation Max van den Stoel. This project receives financial support from the European Parliament, and it does not represent the views of the European Parliament.

Annex 2 – Anniversary speech Daša Šašić Šilović

30-year anniversary speech

Thirty years ago, we came together to build this network – Sonja Lokar, Alena Chudikova, Svetlana Raulatiene, Marianna Knothe, Lena Ag, Marta Szigeti Bonifert, Zita Gurmai, Pia Locatelli, Lisl Kauer, Anita Gradin, Lovorka Marinovic and so many others. I remember when Lena nursed her baby girl at our meetings; when Sonja and Pia rushed to Belgrade to lobby the democratic coalition to introduce the quota in all coalition parties; when Zita lobbied to strengthen her party's women's forum and became the President of PESW; when Marta drew us closer to the environment movement and always steered us with her business sense; when we launched the Korčula School and few believed it would have a future because it has shifted from an exclusively women's paradigm to integrated discussions; when in 2015 Zoran Zaev was the first to sign our regional gender equality platform at the PES Congress in Budapest; when the two Ranko's, Saša and Pedja participated throughout the discussions at our Korčula School in Cavtat; when we all met during the UN CSW in New York at my house and linked our work to the UN process post Beijing…

But I also remember the pain at seeing the scenes of suffering as our former country dissipated in war, the rapes, the killings, the nationalism and ethnic cleansing, as well as the pains of transition when Svetlana at a Vilnius workshop told me to order beef for dinner because women who were there could not afford it … We have not only seen all of this but lived through it and it has shaped our vision.

Tribute should be especially paid to our two Swedish colleagues who were first secretaries general of the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity – Bo Toresson and Conny Fredriksson. They created excellent conditions for us to work and thrive and were followed by Lena Hjelm Wallen, Bjorn von Sidow and our colleague Jonas Andersson with his tireless work in the region. And of course, to the Olof Palme International Center that has stayed the course with us! In conference rooms, in hotel rooms we analyzed, debated, discussed strategies, solicited allies and developed partnerships. But today we have so many new colleagues on the Board - Pavle, Romina, Tamara, Mojca, Lana and Radmila and all of you here that have strengthened and politically empowered us to meet the challenges of the moment.

Reflecting on the past 30 years, it's evident that the journey has been as much about forging strong political and policy frameworks as it has been about nurturing relationships. These bonds grew, rooted in trust and mutual understanding, in cooperation with like-minded individuals, civil society organizations, and social democratic political parties that share our values and objectives. The signing of the Regional Gender Equality Platform, endorsed by all social democratic parties in the region and supported by European counterparts, was a significant stride towards unity of purpose. Similarly, the signing of cooperation agreements with social democratic foundations has not only brought us closer together politically but also holds immense potential for our future regional collaboration.

Associate membership in the PES, membership and representation in PESW, observer status in FEPS and Solidar have bolstered our activities and ensured that our region and its gender equality challenges and experiences are heard. These collaborative efforts are crucial for advancing the rule of law, human rights, democracy, and equality in the region. The Korčula think tank role in providing an open space for dialogue has been instrumental in shaping our approach to current and future challenges to advocate for inclusive, just, equitable and sustained progress. This collaborative spirit is the cornerstone of our achievements and the beacon that guides our path forward.

The journey towards gender equality in the region has been thorny, but there are many significant milestones such as the establishment or refurbishing of equality laws and quota systems in the new legislatures and an increasing effort to mainstream gender equality across sectors, politics and the society. These measures have shown positive outcomes, with increased engagement from male political allies and the empowered women in politics. Violence against women and sexual harassment have become visible and recognized as a crime.

But we have also learned the how-to steps: that a clear strategy should lead to raising awareness and political lobbying, followed by skills and capacities building to integrate gender equality into the political mainstream for policymaking and positioning women at all levels of decision-making. As more women became empowered and assumed leadership roles, the development of strategic partnerships across various sectors, organizations and parties in the region became essential to foster a collaborative environment that supports and amplifies the efforts towards achieving political and societal parity. The progress made in this area, as evidenced by the increasing number of women in political leadership positions reaching 30-40% in the region, underscores the effectiveness of these tiered strategies.

We have also learned that anecdotal, empirical evidence is as important as the academic one; that flexibility and tactics in implementation should accompany shifting political, economic and social environments especially when democracy, human and women's rights are at stake as dynamic social categories; that concrete actions to empower women and promote women's rights should go hand in hand with gender mainstreaming as it is not an either/or choice; that there is no place for complacency in politics when values are concerned and that continuity, consistency, perseverance pays off; that personal competitiveness should not be at the expense of the progressive societal and collective goals; that political concertation and coordination with external partners is as important as their financial contribution.

The pursuit of gender equality is an ever shifting, dynamic and multifaceted challenge that intersects with various societal dimensions, including politics, power structures, patriarchal and cultural norms. Today in many countries, like Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia, not to speak of the US, gender equality, reproductive rights and sexual freedoms are becoming a pivotal point of the ideological, right-wing conservative aggressiveness and a deliberate political agenda. As a political and ideological strategy, it infiltrates personal lives, human relationships, and cultural norms in an attempt to shape laws and change institutions to their liking.

As social democrats we must strategically, robustly, actively, ideologically and politically, meet the challenge of this backlash. We live in challenging times that will shape the lives of future generations. Recognizing gender equality as a central political issue is imperative for the advancement of societies, as it is not only a marker of social progress but also a catalyst for broader democratic political and socio-economic development. It is through continuous dialogue, policy reform, and collective action that gender equality can maintain its rightful place at the forefront of our political progressive, socialdemocratic agendas. The CEE Gender Network and especially our Board and constituency are ready to continue our work supporting social democratic and progressive parties, organisations in the region and partners at the European level.

Going forward let us be nostalgic for the future learning on the nostalgic lessons from the past.

A luta continua; vitória é certa.

Annex 3

2024 KORČULA "SCHOOL" THINK TANK

– Transforming Politics through a Gender Lens-

30 (Friday) – 31 (Saturday) August 2024

Centar za kulturu Korčula, Korčula town[4] - Hybrid (in person/ZOOM)

PARTICIPANTS LIST

Name	Title	Notes
1. Lena Ag	Feminist, one of the CEE Gender Network founders	
2. Emina Adilović	Senior Researcher Associate, Faculty of Political Science, University of Sarajevo	ZOOM
3. Jonas Andersson	Programme Manager, Western Balkans, Olof Palme International Center Sweden	
4. Laszlo Andor	Secretary General FEPS	
5. Jasmina Angelova	Programme Office, Progres Institut, Skopje	
6. Maja Banović	Member of Presidency WF SDP Montenegro	
7. Pavle Bogoevski	Former Programme Director, Progres Institute North Macedonia, Member CEE Gender Network Board	
8. Levend Bicaku	Olof Palme International Center, Priština	
9. Christian Castagna	Former Adviser, Jean Jaurès, France	
10. Anita Celić	Designer	
11. Sasho Dodovski	Secretary General, Progres Institut, Skopje	
12. Tanja Fajon	Minister of Foreign and European Affairs and SDP Slovenia	**Video**
13. Venko Filipče	President, SDSM, North Macedonia	,
14. Heinz Fischer	Former President of Austria, first President EFDS	**Video**
15. Zita Gurmai	President PES Women, MP MSZP Hungary, Member CEE Gender Network Board	
16. Lena Hjelm-Wallen	Former Foreign Minister of Sweden, second President EFDS	
17. Brankica Janković	Commissioner for the Protection of Equality, Serbia (ZOOM)	
18. Mojca Kekuš Kleva	President, Progresiva Slovenia, Member CEE Gender Network Board	
19. Kido Koenig	General Secretary European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity	
20. Ana Kovač	Member of Presidency WF SDP Montenegro	
21. Sonja Kovač	Member of the Governing Board, SDP Croatia, VP SDP WF, VP PES Women	
22. Radojka Kraljević	Professor, Libertas University Zagreb	
23. Johanna Kvist	SDP International Secretary Womens organization Sweden	
24. Romina Kuko	Deputy Minister of Interior Albania, International Secretary of Socialist Party Albania, and Head of the Municipal Council of Tirana	
25. Ann Linde	Former Minister of Foreign Affairs Sweden	

[4] https://kulturakorcula.hr

26. Višnja Ljubičić	Ombudswoman, Croatia	
27. Pia Locatelli	Honorary President SIW, International Secretary PSI Italy, Member of Presidency PES, Member CEE Gender Network Board	
28. Sonja Lokar	Former CEE Gender Network Executive Director	**ZOOM**
29. Vinka Lozica	Councilwoman Korčula, New Left Croatia – "Korčula after party"	
30. Stefan Löfven	President PES, former Prime Minister of Sweden	**ZOOM**
31. Linn Lukschandl	Head of Programmes, International Olof Palme Center, Sweden	
32. Saša Magazinović	MP SDP Bosnia and Herzegovina, representative in the Council of Europe	
33. Demir Mahmutčehajić	Antifascist organiser, feminist and human rights activist, Bosnia and Herzegovina Stolac	
34. Bojan Maricik	International Secretary SDSM, North Macedonia	
35. Lovorka Marinović	President CNI Croatia, Member CEE Gender Network Board	
36. Nikša Marinović	Music producer, MC	
37. Emira Mešanović	Olof Palme International Center, Belgrade	
38. Zoran Milanović	President, Croatia	**Video/tbc**
39. Danilo Milić	Olof Palme International Center, Belgrade	
40. Nataša Milojević	President FOSDI, Serbia	
41. Martina Naumovska	Secretary General, WF SDSM, North Macedonia	
42. Matjaž Nemc	Vice President, SD Slovenia, MEP	**ZOOM**
43. Dino Nikšić	Member of the Assembly, Foundation for Left Initiatives, Sarajevo	
44. Seudin Novalić	President of the Assembly, Foundation for Left Initiatives, Sarajevo	
45. Brankica Obuljen	Adviser, CEE Gender Network	
46. Azra Okić	President, WF SDP Bosnia and Herzegovina	
47. Jelena Ostojić	Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb	
48. Ranko Ostojić	Vice President, SDP Croatia, former Deputy Prime Minister of Croatia	
49. Dijana Pavičić Hanis	Member, Presidency WF SDP Croatia	
50. Nebojša Paunović	Adviser, Office of the Ombudsperson, Croatia	
51. Lana Prlić	VP SDP Bosnia and Herzegovina, MP, Member CEE Gender Network Board	
52. Andrasz Pulai	Director of Strategy, Publicus Research	
53. Edi Rama	Prime Minister, President SP Albania	**Video**
54. Dragana Rašić Jovanović	President WF Democratic Party, Serbia	
55. Maria João Rodrigues	President, FEPS	**ZOOM/in person/tbc**
56. Robert Scott Heaslet	Senior Reisdent Director, NDI North Macedonia	
57. Ledjon Shahini	Executive Director, Qemal Stafa Foundation, Albania	
58. Iris Skrt	Women's Forum SDP Slovenia	
59. Aleksandar Spasov	Professor, Faculty of Lae, Skopje	
60. Danijela Stanojević	Media Adviser, CEE Gender Network	
61. Borislav Stefanović	VP Party of Freedom and Justice Serbia, MP Parliament of Serbia	
62. Marta Szigeti Bonifert	Member, CEE Gender Network Board, Board Member of the European Partners for the Environment	
63. Daša Šašić Šilović	Chair, CEE Gender Network, President European Partners for	

	the Environment	
64. Radmila Šekerinska	VP PES, CEE Gender Network Board member	
65. Dijana Šobat	Executive Director for International Cooperation and for organizational development (SSSH)	
66. Tamara Tripić	President Network for Democratic Dialogue, Member CEE Gender Network Board	
67. Kata Tűttő	Deputy Mayor, Budapest, MSZP MP Hungary	
68. Nina Ű́nesi	President S-Kvinnor, Sweden	
69. Erion Veliaj	Mayor of Tirana, SP Albania	
70. Josip Visković	Photographer, video producer, director	
71. Bjorn von Sydow	President, European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity	
72. Nataša Vučković	Secretary General, Center for Democracy Foundation	
73. Margot Wallström	Former Deputy Prime Minister and former Foreign Minister, Sweden, Chairwoman of Olof Palme International Center	**Video**
74. Jure Zubčić	SDP Croatia	
75. Visar Ymeri	Institute for Social Studies, Pristina, former leader of the Socialdemocratic Party of Kosovo	

[i] Engleski sa hrvatskim prijevodom