

Newsletter

**“Progressive Men and Women on the Move for Gender
Equality”**

June 2016

Foreword

Dear Readers,

*The Central and Eastern European Network for Gender Issues is hereby launching its first quarterly Newsletter “**Progressive Men and Women on the Move for Gender Equality**”. The Newsletter is dedicated to all progressive women and men who cherish human rights, women’s rights and fight for equality, social justice and the empowerment of women.*

Established in 1994, as part of the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, the CEE Network supports the capacities of progressive and social-democratic political parties and women’s organisations to integrate gender equality and women’s rights into policies, programmes and political, social and public activities.

The CEE Network is member of the Party of European Socialist Women (PESW) and observer member of the Party of European Socialists. Its signature activity is the annual think tank meeting – “Korčula School” intended to bring together progressive women and men political leaders, particularly from South Eastern Europe, to discuss gender equality issues from a political perspective. This year the meeting will discuss the plight of refugee and migrant women.

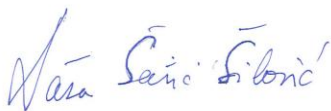
You can also follow us on our social media.

Facebook: CEE Gender Network

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The Newsletter will bring information, political insights, comments and references relating to human rights and gender equality with particular focus on the Western Balkans and Central Europe.

We hope you will find the Newsletter useful and we encourage your contributions, comments and references.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Daša Šašić Šilović".

*Daša Šašić Šilović
Chair, International Board, CEE Network for Gender Issues*

COMMENTARIES

1. Croatia

Women's reproductive rights at stake again

Pro-choice vs. pro-life marches in Zagreb in May 2016 is illustrated by one of the most thought-provoking messages by a pro-choice activist: "I couldn't have imagined marching against this s*** in 2016!"

The latest developments in Croatia - and by that I mean conservative extremists both in Government and Parliament, as well as within civil society, have put women's human rights, particularly health and reproductive rights at stake.

Women's reproductive rights in Croatia have been guaranteed since the 1970's, with a progressive approach that included respect for women's free decision-making in terms of pregnancy. Yet, in an environment of high tensions, in a deeply polarized society and with a fueled discussion on demographic issues, pro-conservative, even extremist groups have been able to mobilize for a pro-life approach.

Photo: Forum žena SDP



It all started a couple of years ago, in 2013, with the rise of civil society organizations such as "In the name of the Family", that successfully organized an anti-gay referendum, succeeding in what is now a constitutional definition of marriage as only a heterosexual union. Back then it was pretty obvious that right-wing extremists are well-funded, well-organized and determined to take us way back into the Dark.

Behind scenes: Croatian society, with its social fabric torn apart, with all sorts of makeovers (especially when it comes to 20th century history) and with challenges that include public brain-drain as well as freedom of the press and speech, is in a desperate need of progressive answers. Those answers can come from centre-left and left parties and CSO's, where more synergy and mutual understanding is needed. Authoritarian tendencies of the current Government, dominated by the EPP-member HDZ, are a serious threat to human rights, women's human rights, secular and modern public education and health, as well as freedom of the media, expression and political and civic engagement.

Quite frankly: a sort of "urbanization" of Croatia is in place. And women's right to take decisions regarding her body autonomously are first to be challenged. We need to fight it!



Karolina Leaković, SDP Croatia Women's Forum and PES Women Vice-President

2. BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA:

How we managed, once again, to preserve our achievements

We, women of Bosnia and Herzegovina, are very proud of the accomplishments that we have achieved in the post-war election rules and processes regarding gender equality. Concerted activity of women from NGOs and politicians, supported by regional colleagues and the OSCE has resulted in a 30% quota for the less represented gender on candidate lists in the Provisional Election rules (1998), and then in the B&H Election law, which was passed in 2001. The election rule also established the position of the less represented gender on the lists, so that the two first candidates had to be of different sexes, as well as two out of five, three out of eight and so on respectively...

This achievement has greatly improved the number of women on the candidate lists, but since the lists in Bosnia and Herzegovina are open, the number of elected women never reached this percentage – an issue still under discussion.

In the 2013 Election Law, through the action of parliamentarians and NGOs, there has been an increase of the quota to 40%. This corresponds to EU standards. The Election Law is hence in compliance with the B&H Gender Equality Law.

But the Devil does not sleep! Every five to six years in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the right wing party, when in power, tries to unravel these achievements. In attempts to change the Election Law, proposed amendments always result in proposals regarding "women's" achievements. Fortunately, every time we women organized and managed to defend our rights. That happened again, in April 2016.

One should know that the achieved level of gender equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina's laws is not a true reflection of the state of consciousness or democracy in the B&H society, but is much more driven to reflect the needs to fit the demanding EU standards, since as a society and country we are committed to become an EU member one day. The fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina has submitted its application for EU accession played, fortunately, an important role to thwart the efforts of the parliamentary majority to introduce Election Law amendments which would annul the achievements and mechanisms that we have built for greater women's representation in legislative bodies.

Around the International Women's Day - 8 March - it was announced that an inter-sectoral working group, established to prepare amendments to the Bosnia and Herzegovina Election Law, proposed to the B&H Parliament to specifically annul the established order of the less represented gender on electoral lists and also to drastically increase the internal mechanism on mobility within electoral lists. This would render senseless the concept of open lists and would impede on the mobility of women or men candidates on the list commensurate to the number of gained votes, i.e. the will of the voters.

We, social democrat women, immediately recognised the potential dangers of such a proposal, which would cause damage to most women and again marginalise them. We immediately

organised and made this problem publically visible: we wrote articles on e-portals, informed the PES and the CEE Network for Gender Issues, openly in public gatherings we tried to animate women from the parliamentary majority and finally organised a street protest, disseminating a leaflet in which we spelled out what the change of the Election Law would bring.

It is interesting that at the same time an NGO and Gender Equality Commission of the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina had launched an initiative to increase the quota to 50% in the Election Law, as well as to adopt a rule on mandatory representation of the less represented gender in governments and ministries at all the levels. This is a very important step in the overall efforts in the field of gender equality, but in this case it brought a little confusion because many did not understand what we are actually fighting for.

We managed to preserve the achievements! Our efforts have borne fruit; they brought the result that we have advocated for. Unfortunately, the 50% representation on the lists was not accepted, but the idea about quotas in the executive bodies was supported. This should, in the future, be built into a legal regulation.

Photo: Forum Žena SDP BIH

In this activity, we were wholeheartedly supported by politicians and advocates from the region, the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity and the CEE Network which sent an open letter to parliamentarians and the leadership of the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina with the signatures of support from very relevant names from the region and the EU. We should not forget our male allies within the SDP B&H leadership, as well as individuals from NGOs and international organizations.

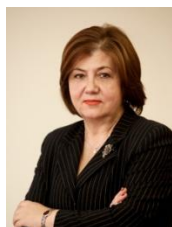


This once again demonstrates that with an organized activity at home and solidarity in the region, we can achieve good results in the defense of our women's achievements.

Still, there is a bitter feeling that the proposal to annul the previous parity solution in the Election Law came from a high-ranking woman politician, who said that she was ashamed to be a part of the quota! Unfortunately, the women from the parliamentary majority equally remained silent and failed to raise a voice against the proposed change. Fortunately, under great pressure, the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina has given up on the proposed changes.

A similar situation happened as well in 2005 and in 2009. We have shown that we know how to preserve our achievements. We have shown that we have become a relevant political factor that cannot be bypassed or even ignored.

We started our future!



Besima Borić, SDP BIH Presidency Member

3. SLOVENIA:

Back door neo-liberal legalisation on prostitution in Slovenia

Radical right wing forces are on the march against women's human rights by organising "Walks for life", public prayers in front of maternity wards and through the intimidation of defenders of freedom of choice by publicly naming and shaming us as the "abortion lobby". This is an open and public offensive and we need to express our positions and organise to defend and promote our different views. The internationally orchestrated and growing backlash coming from radical neo-liberal forces against women's human rights uses totally different strategies.

Mainstream neo-liberals are using sneaky strategies to avoid to raise taxes on the really rich and to fill empty state coffers with collecting taxes from anybody who is not powerful enough to avoid to pay them. It is common knowledge that prostitution is the third most lucrative global industry, after the selling of arms and drugs, and hence, prostitutes and pimps and owners of the illegal brothels are not paying taxes!

In Slovenia, few weeks ago, Amnesty International with a great support of many young feminists, women and quite a number of men, started to publicly promote the decriminalisation of all agents engaged in legalised prostitution, defining prostitution as work, as any other freely marketed personal service with the argumentation that this is a solution which will best protect sexual workers from violence and exploitation and set them free from terrible social stigma.

My position in this debate was that prostitution is not the oldest craft but the oldest form of abuse and violence against women. Hence, we should opt for the abolition, which means to decriminalise the prostitutes and offer them the means to get out of this most tragic, dangerous and harmful poverty trap and to do whatever we could to diminish the demand (so to criminalise the CLIENTS) and to severely prosecute and punish pimps and organisers who are molesting, abusing and exploiting the big majority of the prostitutes. Accepting prostitution as work as any other work we might condemn the majority of the prostitutes to "eternal hell" with the best of intentions.

As a result I have been invited to a public debate on the issue, organised by a young feminist group named "Iskra", a left students' organisation in Ljubljana on May 28th 2016. To my very unpleasant surprise, the panelist who presented the Slovenian legal framework regarding the issue of prostitution, revealed how three different neo-liberal governments sneakily and without any public debate on the matter, de facto, step by small step, legalised the prostitution in Slovenia.

Step one: Decriminalisation of the prostitute who is not selling her body in public space. The attempt to define voluntary prostitution as any other craft based on self-employment, has then been omitted because of the strong opposition of Socialdemocratic Women's Forum and the Government Office for gender equality.

Step two: Change of the Penal Code in a way that pimps and organisers can be more severely prosecuted and punished but only if they lure, traffic, force persons into prostitution or disproportionally exploit the prostitutes. In this way, the Slovenian mainstream politics, without

any public debate, introduced the neo-liberal concept of differentiating between legal "voluntary" and criminal "forced prostitution", similarly to the policy solutions in Germany.

Step three: When the register of professions has been renewed, the profession: prostitute (only for a woman) has been introduced. There was again no public debate on the matter. On this occasion, the Office for equal opportunities made only a modest technical request to add a masculine form of the new profession!

Step four: The respective ministry, again without any public debate, adjusted technical standards for crafts and services dealing with body care (massaging salon, solarium, fitness) so that they can also totally legally perform and pay taxes for selling sexual services, including the sexual act, on their premises.

The organisations defending women human rights and fighting violence against women, including SD WF were not even aware of this process. It happened under the form of small amendments presented as “modernization” of the Penal Code and as a technical improvement of the register of professions and definition of conditions for selling marketed services for bodily care.

Progressive feminists in Slovenia will now have to unmask what has already happened. We will not organise a public discussion on which alternative is better, legalization or abolition of prostitution, but how to get rid of sneakily implemented badly legalised prostitution and how to replace it by the Scandinavian model of abolition.



Sonja Lokar, Executive Director, CEE Network Ljubljana Office

EVENTS

“Women on the move”

The regional offices of **UN Women** and **Oxfam** from Istanbul have invited the CEE Network for Gender Issues to present its approach to gender aspects of the ongoing refugee crises at their regional workshop entitled **"Women on the move"** on May 16-18, 2016 in Istanbul.

Photo: UN Women/John Bleho



This workshop brought together nearly 50 outstanding women and refugee needs and rights advocate NGOs from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, all along the Balkan route up to the Kvinna till Kvinna in Sweden. The attendees have together developed a set of common recommendations that have been shared at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul.

Key recommendations for global leaders, detailed in this statement, include the need to:

- Address the root causes of the wars in Syria and Iraq;
- Ensure greater participation of refugees in programmes that affect them;
- Provide safe and legal passages for refugees and migrants;
- Establish more transparent, effective and accountable funding mechanisms to support refugees;
- Carry out more studies to better understand the positive impact of refugees/ migrants on host countries economies;
- Amplify the voices of activists supporting the rights of refugees and migrants.

See more at: <http://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/05/protect-rights-of-refugee-women-and-girls-say-advocates>

Sonja Lokar, Executive Director, CEE Network Ljubljana Office



INFORMATION AND REFERENCES

1. Kornelia Ninova – first female president of BSP

The 49th Congress of the **Bulgarian Socialist Party** convened on 7th and 8th of May 2016 in Sofia.

The Congress was devoted to discussion of main political tasks before BSP, debate on the political course of the party in view of its 125th anniversary and election of national leadership of the BSP.

The Congress elected **Kornelia Ninova** as chairwoman of the Bulgarian Socialist Party. Ninova, the first woman to lead the party, is one of the most prominent figures from the left wing in the fight for the social rights of Bulgarian people and against the restrictive right-wing policies.

Kornelia Ninova was born on 16th of January 1969 in the village of Krushovica (Vratza region, Northwestern Bulgaria). She has a degree in Law from the University of Sofia. Before entering politics she has worked as a judge in the Sofia City Court, legal advisor in Sofia Municipality, investigator in Sofia Investigative Service and executive director of Technoimpex.



Ninova became a member of the Bulgarian Socialist Party in 2003. Between 2005 and 2007 she was deputy minister of economy and energy responsible for foreign economic policy. She was also chair of the Board of Bulgartabac Holding. Since 2009 Ninova is a Member of Parliament. In 2013 and 2014 she chaired the Social Policy Committee in the Bulgarian Parliament and initiated the adoption of a number of measures against youth unemployment, in support for needy families and protection of competition to ensure order in dealings between large trade companies and small producers.

Ninova won the vote of 395 delegates against 349 votes for incumbent chairman Mihail Mikov. The Congress also elected the 185 members of the National Council. Of those 30 % are women and 20% are young people under 35 years of age. The Congress adopted Political Platform and Declaration "125 Years BSP".

Ninova said that change should begin, within the BSP, to renew it, and then to take a hardline approach to the government and what was happening in Bulgaria. The BSP should be an alternative, and by the end of the year should develop an alternative national plan “to get Bulgaria out of this situation”. Ninova also said the new leader, whoever it might be, should unite the party and press for early elections, aiming to oust the “inhuman” centre-right government, led by Prime Minister Boiko Borissov.

Ninova faces a tough task in rebuilding support for a party hit by divisions and which has seen several poor performances at general and local elections. The goal is to transform BSP into a force that represents the working class, small farmers, the young, the weak, the vulnerable and

disadvantaged, the small family businesses, the progressive intellectuals. To stand beside these people, they need to also be a party of integrity.

The BSP came second in the 2014 parliamentary election, collecting 18.3% of the vote. Borisov's GERB party won comfortably with 35.9%.

<http://sofiaglobe.com/2016/05/08/opposition-bulgarian-socialist-party-elects-first-woman-leader/>

<http://www.euractiv.com/section/elections/news/bulgarian-socialists-elect-woman-as-leader/>

<http://www.politicoscope.com/2016/05/09/bulgaria-kornelia-ninova-bsp-new-leader/>

2. Female poverty is reality

Today in Europe there are **122 million** people facing poverty. Poverty affects more women than men, especially single mothers.

Belgium **S&D MEP Marie Arena** said: "Women are first victims of austerity policies and the economic crises, passing on the **poverty cycle** to the next generations and their children."

"It's crucial to encourage women to enter and stay in the labour market, which can ensure their financial independence and break the vicious circle of poverty."

<http://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/newsroom/female-poverty-reality-must-be-addressed>

3. Reception of female refugees and asylum seekers in the EU

Since 2015, there has been a huge increase in the numbers of asylum seekers in the European Union. A large majority of these asylum seekers are male. Female asylum seekers and girls represent a minority and are in need of protection. International and EU law provide protection for these women and girls. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Council of Europe has adopted instruments which require asylum application procedures and reception conditions to be made more **gender-sensitive**. EU law has recognized gender based persecution as a ground for granting refugee status. In reception, EU law provides guidance on facilities for women and the asylum applications of female asylum seekers. However, additional protection is only provided when women are considered to be vulnerable persons. This could be the case for pregnant women and women who have been victims of gender-based violence.

According to the **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**, 1 015 078 people arrived by sea (mainly by the Mediterranean Sea) in the EU in 2015. Of these people 50 per cent were men, 19 per cent were women and 31 per cent were children.

Young and unaccompanied girls and single women need extra attention after arriving in a reception centre. These girls and women travelling alone face more risks. They can become victims of sexual and gender-based violence²⁶ during their journey but also in the reception centres, since they are not under protection of family members or fellow travelers. The UNHCR has noted that some women even marry someone on the journey out of desperation for protection.

Violence against women should be prevented. The safety of women and children is better guaranteed when they are housed separately from men. In reception centers, information should be provided that violence against women, including domestic violence is considered to be a crime.

Reception of female refugees and asylum seekers in the EU – Case study Belgium
[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/556946/IPOL_IDA\(2016\)556946_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/556946/IPOL_IDA(2016)556946_EN.pdf)

Women and girls in the humanitarian emergencies
[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/556944/IPOL_IDA\(2016\)556944_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/556944/IPOL_IDA(2016)556944_EN.pdf)

4. Men dominate positions of power in Eastern Partnership countries

The findings show that women are remarkably absent from the power structures in Eastern Partnership countries, such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

On average only 17 out of 136 senior ministerial positions in Eastern Partnership countries were held by women in 2015. Women constituted 16% of the elected Members of Parliament, well below gender balance. In the highest ranking civil servant positions, women accounted for only 17 %. The study “**Women in Power and Decision-Making in the Eastern Partnership Countries**” not only allows direct comparisons and benchmarking among Eastern Partnership countries, but also with EU countries.

Gender has been identified as priority area by the **EaP Platform I Work Programme 2014-2017**.

<http://eige.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/men-dominate-positions-power-eastern-partnership-countries>

http://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/gender_equality_and_decision_making_in_ea_p_countries_2015_-_report_and_annex_one_file.pdf

5. Parental Leave

The European Parliament stressed in its resolution of 9 June 2015 the importance of **equality** in parental leave and called for affordable parental leave schemes. **The Parliament's Committee for Employment and Social Affairs** voted its report on the application of the 2010 Directive (rapporteur: Maria Arena, S&D, Belgium) in the Committee on 16 March 2016. It welcomes that Member States have transposed the measures of the Directive beyond the stipulated minimum and in a manner that allow workers some degree of flexibility. It regrets, however, that not all Member States have provided the Commission with correspondence tables between the provisions and the transposition measures and that social welfare rights are not always granted throughout the entire duration of parental leave. It urges the activation of the revision clause in EU legislation on parental leave and calls for the extension of the minimum duration of parental leave to six months. A plenary debate on the report is scheduled for May 2016.

Definition of Parental leave by OECD: employment-protected leave of absence for employed parents, which is often supplementary to specific maternity and paternity leave periods, and frequently, but not in all countries, follows the period of maternity leave. Entitlement to the parental leave period is often individual (i.e. each parent has their own entitlement) while entitlement to public income support is often family-based, so that in general only one parent claims such income support at any one time (except for a short period after childbirth). In some countries parental leave is generally a sharable family entitlement but with certain periods reserved for use by the mother or father, while in others (such as Austria and Germany) 'bonus' paid weeks are offered if both parents use a certain portion of the family entitlement. Assuming that the family wishes to maximize the total length of leave on offer, this implies that a certain number of weeks are effectively 'reserved' for fathers.

Publication on maternal leave for members of the EP and national parliament's country by country

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/556937/IPOL_IDA\(2016\)556937_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/556937/IPOL_IDA(2016)556937_EN.pdf)

6. The Istanbul Convention

The European Commission has launched a proposal for the European Union to sign and ratify the Council of Europe's **Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence**.

The Istanbul Convention is the first European binding instrument specifically devoted to violence against women and an important step forward for equality. It recognizes violence against women as a **human rights violation**, a form of discrimination against women and as a manifestation of unequal power relations. It addresses violence against women through measures aimed at preventing violence, protecting victims, and prosecuting the perpetrators.

List of Council of Europe member states that have signed or ratified convention

<http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/210/signatures>

7. WOMEN MIGRANTS

EP Report on the situation of women refugees and asylum seekers in the EU; Rapporteur **Mary Honeyball** (March 2016)

Honeyball: Women are faced with violence that they have been fleeing from in their home country; violence on the journey, very often from smugglers and traffickers and sadly sometimes also from other refugees. It is a violent situation in itself. Women are vulnerable, particularly if they are on their own.

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A8-2016-0024+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20160226STO16256/Refugees-There-is-a-real-need-to-protect-women-and-children>

<http://www.migrantwomennetwork.org/wordpress/?cat=3>

<http://eupanelwatch.com/2016/03/08/refuge-for-women-refugees/>

8. Cyprus Women's Lobby Campaign

Cyprus is among the three countries in the EU that have the lowest representation of women in politics. Through the election campaign the Cyprus Women's Lobby concluded that gender issues are not high on the political agenda of neither the political parties nor the candidates.

During election period Cyprus Women's Lobby organized the **#ICOMMIT2016** campaign and invited all candidates to participate and ensure that gender equality will be high on the political agenda during the next term of Parliament.

The **#ICOMMIT2016** Campaign concerns the following **six commitments** that the candidates and potential MPs were asked to commit to and support if elected:

1. To support all efforts to combat and eliminate violence against women.
2. To ensure the reconciliation of work and family life.
3. To integrate a gender perspective into all policies including the state budget (gender budgeting).
4. To ensure the reduction and elimination of the pay gap between women and men.
5. To promote the equal participation of women in all levels of economic and political decisions.
6. To act with transparency, based on the principles of democracy, fairness, equality, justice, with a strong social conscience.

Of the total of 108 women candidates **40%** pledged their commitment, while of the 385 men, only **16%** committed themselves.

<http://www.womenlobby.org/You-Commit-I-Vote-ICOMMIT2016>

Research on gender gap in women's leadership in Cyprus 2015

[http://thehubcy.org/media/files/Women's%20Leadership%20and%20Participation%20in%20Decision-making\(1\).pdf](http://thehubcy.org/media/files/Women's%20Leadership%20and%20Participation%20in%20Decision-making(1).pdf)

Database on gender statistics

<http://eige.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/looking-gender-statistics-you-can-count-and-compare>

http://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs?utm_source=newsletter17&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter

IMPRESSUM

“PROGRESSIVE MEN AND WOMEN ON THE MOVE FOR GENDER EQUALITY”

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