EUROPEANIZATION OF FAMILY POLICIES: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POLICY DISCOURSES ON GENDER EQUALITY IN CARE POLICIES IN CZECH REPUBLIC, LITHUANIA AND SLOVAKIA

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Abstract: The article explores the conceptualization of gender equality in family policies in Czech Republic, Lithuania and Slovakia from the Europeanization perspective. Through the methodology of critical frame analysis it investigates multiple meanings of gender equality concepts interwoven with care policies and reveals sources of contestation and their implication for the policy design. As family policies are often closely related to national value systems, they represent milieu of contestation of gender equality and clash with the Europeanization perspective. Comparative analysis of the three European states shows that Europeanization happens in family policies despite the fact that the domain is primarily under the competences of nation states. The EU gender equality concepts and policies are translated to domestic setting when they resonate the most and do not challenge existent gender regimes. Moreover, the meaning of policy concepts is stretched and bent in order to fit national context. As a result, already compromised gender equality goals of the EU policies are often even more distorted if combined with domestic discourses opposing gender equality from neo-liberal and/or conservative perspectives.

Keywords: Europeanization; family policy; gender equality; policy discourses; parental leave; child-care; reconciliation of family and work.

This article examines the Europeanization of family policies from a gender perspective in Czech Republic, Lithuania and Slovakia. It is positioned between Europeanization and gender equality studies as it concentrates on family policies that fall out of the realm of the EU core areas and remain in the competencies of nation states. Therefore, they are rarely investigated for possible Europeanization effects, particularly in the case of those member states that joined the EU in and after 2004. Family policies address gender relations by looking at their main functions such as parenting, caring, pooling resources, maintaining work and other (Verloo 2007). The status of women within family and welfare regimes affects to a considerable degree their position in society (Roth 2008). The focus of the article is to investigate how gender is incorporated into family policies. It leads to the examination of the multiple meanings of gender (in)equality in family policies and helps to reveal to what extent they are influenced by discursive framing facilitated by the EU and/or by domestic discourses. As family policies are closely related to national value systems, they often represent milieu of contestation of gender equality and clashes with the Europeanization of policies. Consequently, this particular policy domain provides an interesting case for investigation of the dynamics between Europeanization and domestic contexts.

The Czech Republic, Lithuania and Slovakia are the subjects for the analysis due to their differences in family and gender equality policies. Following models of public and private labour division proposed by Fraser, Ciccia and Verloo argue that the Czech Republic and Slovakia appertain to the traditional male breadwinner model while Lithuania belongs to the caregiver parity model (Ciccia & Verloo 2012). Javornik in her study of the interaction between parental leave and child-care policies, differentiates the countries even further (Javornik 2014). The Czech Republic serves as an example of an explicit familialism providing relatively high parental benefits while care facilities are almost non-existent. Slovakia represents implicit familialism that only partially encourages family care for small children, nevertheless, the state does not provide adequate child care support. Contrary, Javornik cites Lithuania as an example of a country supporting de-familialism by having comparatively short and highly compensated leave, functioning network of care facilities and promoting active fatherhood (Javornik 2014). Both aforementioned studies are based on quantitative and qualitative research of policy actions, however, they do not deal with discursive framing of policies and possible effects it might have on policy implementation which, as Lombardo and Forest argue, is probably closer to empirical reality rather than constructing general models of Europeanization (Lombardo & Forest 2012).

This article therefore adds a discursive perspective to existing research of family policies and explores framing and normative underpinnings of national policies and accompanying discourses in order to reveal how gender (in)equality is conceptualized and what are the gender bias embedded in policies (Verloo & Lombardo 2007). Following the feminist theoretical and methodological perspective we will apply critical frame analysis methodology in order to identify meanings of gender equality concepts and their "shrinking, stretching and bending" (Lombardo *et al.* 2009) into family policy objectives and developments. Inquiries into legal acts, national programs and action plans and parliamentary policy debates related to family policies in all three countries will suggest that gender equality is shrunk to target only women, stretched to allow women to balance employment and family duties and bent to fit dominant domestic discourses.

We will first briefly discuss the literature on Europeanization and present the main theoretical perspectives to contextualize the interpretations of gender equality in the Czech Republic, Lithuania and Slovakia. Later, we will look for the meanings of gender equality in care policies, which are usually the domain of family. The particular focus will be on parental leave, reconciliation of work and family life and affordability of childcare services – the areas formulated also by the EU policies. Finally, we compare framing of policies of the three country-cases in order to identify how the EU concepts are adopted at national

level so they fit into domestic settings (either neo-liberal or conservative) and coexist with domestic conceptualization of gender equality and family.

The Europeanization Perspective

Most frequently the studies of the Europeanization of gender equality in the member states (which joined the EU in 2004) have focused on compliance and implementation (among others Sloat 2004; Falkner & Traib 2008; Krizsan & Zentai 2006; Reingardiene & Tereskinas 2006; Pavlik *et al.* 2008). As the studies emphasize outcomes and top-down approach towards Europeanization, they often draw a strict line between gender equality areas governed by hard and soft legislation, leaving the domain of family policies untouched. More recent studies apply sociological and discursive approaches towards Europeanization and bring domestic factors to the fore as mediators in the process of policy adoption (among others Lombardo *et al.* 2009; Jacquot & Wall 2003; Lombardo & Forest 2012). This suggests shifting the analysis from assessing compliance towards examining the construction of gender equality in policies and its effects in member states. Furthermore, feminist researchers have argued that the impact of Europeanization may vary across different gender equality fields depending on the domains in which gender equality concepts are prioritized or marginalized by domestic policy actors (Krizsan & Popa 2012; Kantola 2010).

This article builds the understanding of Europeanization relying upon Radaelli's (2004) definition stressing construction, diffusion and institutionalization of rules, procedures, policy paradigms and norms defined at the EU level and incorporated into domestic discourses, structures and policies. As such, it favours a sociological and more particularly a discursive approach towards Europeanization. This approach underlines the possibilities to study the complexity of mechanisms such as the appropriateness of EU policies to domestic challenges, internalization of norms, values and discourses. Schimmelfenning and Sedelmeier developed three models of Europeanization (Schimmelfenning & Sedelmeier 2005). The first one is based on conditionality and punishment for noncompliance as external incentives to adopt policies by member states. Contrary, the social-learning model focuses on the relevance of policies for the domestic context and the "cultural match" with the values they represent. Social learning is facilitated by the perception of the EU as an aspiration group, legitimacy of rules and procedures and resonance with domestic factors. Finally, the lesson-drawing model describes the voluntary policy transfer initiated at the domestic level as a potential for solving domestic issues (Schimmelfenning & Sedelmeier 2005).

All three Europeanization models as indicated by Schimmelfenning and Sedelmeier are present within the EU care policies (Schimmelfenning &

Sedelmeier 2005). Regulations of maternity and parental leave, covered by the EU directives, belong to the external incentive model as their adoption is binding. Balancing of work and family and child-care policies are pursued by the Open Method of Coordination belonging to the social learning mechanisms of Europeanization. Further on, the lesson drawing model is often apparent in the case of the adoption of paternity leave that does not belong to the EU official policies; nevertheless it has been voluntarily introduced in several member states[1] and represents horizontal Europeanization inspired by successful policies in other countries. Schimmelfenning and Sedelmeier pointed out that legitimacy of rules, their clarity and coherent application influence conformity to policies. When rules are subjected to various interpretations and benevolence of implementation is present, the motivation to comply is lower (Schimmelfenning & Sedelmeier 2005). Child-care and reconciliation policies of the EU have been broadly criticized for being unclear, incoherent and having discrepancies on conceptual and application level. For example, Barcelona child-care targets do not distinguish between public and private child-care, nor differentiate part-time from full-time services. These uncertainties might affect the limited accessibility to the child-care services or have negative consequences for parents in arranging their working time. Due to the insufficient definition of child-care services, even countries that comply with Barcelona targets may face care deficits experienced by many parents (Morgan 2008).

The analysis of the EU policies on work-life balance shows several divergent and ambiguous interpretations. The European discourse on reconciliation of work and family life is underlined by diverse and often competing strands such as economy, employment and demographic concerns (among others Lombardo & Meier 2008; Morgan 2008). Framing of reconciliation within the hegemonic aims of economic growth shifted the meaning of the concept. The original idea promoting sharing of family responsibilities between women and men was transformed to a tool to enhance productivity through women's participation in the labour market (Stratigaki 2004). The wider approach of sharing and involvement of men into unpaid work was reduced to women in employment. Successful implementation of work-life balance thus does not denote equality between women and men; it rather represents the improvement for women to combine work and family duties. The framing of the issue has led to a shift of interpretation from a progressive gender equality measure into a measure based on traditional notions of gender roles. Another critique of reconciliation focuses on encouragement of women's participation in the labour market and disregards the questions of masculine normativity of the functioning of the labour market. Women are supposed to catch up with men in employment (Meier *et al.* 2007). This framing of reconciliation fits well into the neo-liberal concept of the market

[1] Including Lithuania out of our examined cases.

that is based on the normative model of employability, reconceptualization of behaviour along economic lines and individual responsibility for her or his own welfare (Rose 1996). Underlying neo-liberal norms of labour market transposed into family policies often oppose values of equality. Finally, concepts of balancing work and family became closely linked to the flexibility of the labour market. Considering the fact that the measures mostly target women, it is often translated into part-time work and flexible working arrangements. The flexibility at work allows combining work and family responsibilities, but at the same time it reinforces the unequal position of women in the labour market (Morgan 2008). Reconciliation measures thus often contradict other gender equality goals such as diminishing of the pay-gap and the gender segregation in the labour market.

In sum, the legitimacy and clarity of rules governing the EU family policies is questionable and leaves space to various interpretations promoting or contesting gender equality. Furthermore, as Schimmelfenning and Sedelmeier indicate, the "cultural match" of the EU norms is necessary for the successful social learning of member states (Schimmelfenning & Sedelmeier 2005). Member states are likely to resist policies that challenge their national norms and patterns, particularly in the case of gender equality and family related issues as they contradict state's welfare regimes and the gender order underlying it (Ostner & Lewis 1995). Ulrike Liebert argues that the adoption of EU gender equality policies could be hindered by two types of national attitudes – either traditional beliefs about the inevitably unequal nature of women and men's roles in the division of societal labour or gender-neutral regimes (Liebert 2003). The first one obviously clashes with equal opportunity and equal treatment concepts, whereas the second one, although rooted in egalitarian norms, ignores the embedded gender-biased institutional context that reproduces inequalities between women and men.

Considering the presented theoretical positions, our approach towards the Europeanization of family policies is based on the analysis of policy discourses and identification of how the EU policy concepts are translated to, complemented and contested by domestic discourses. By examining the dynamics between Europeanization and domestic contexts, the article focuses on the cultural match of policies with national regimes and identifies national attitudes contesting gender equality. Due to the limited space of the article, it focuses solely on discursive processes and leaves aside institutions and actors as important factors of fixing concepts and diffusing norms.

Methodology

Critical frame analysis method applied in the presented research originates in a methodological approach introduced by Verloo and Lombardo

and elaborated within the QUING project[2] (Verloo & Lombardo 2007). It offers a tool for analysing competing conceptions of gender equality inherent in political discourse. Critical frame analysis uncovers how gender equality is conceptualized, where and in which structure gender inequality problems and their solutions are located. Verloo defines policy frame as "an organizing principle that transforms fragmentary or incidental information into a structured and meaningful problem in which a solution is implicitly or explicitly included" (Verloo 2005, 20). Frames thus represent problems on two main dimensions – 'diagnosis' that describe how the problem is represented and 'prognosis' in which solutions are proposed. Frames are constructed as a result of discursive negotiations between members of the policy community. As such, policy framing is an outcome of many actors (included but also excluded) in the process of negotiation over a problem and is not attributed to a single actor. Critical frame analysis builds upon Bacchi's differentiation between intentional and unintentional framing. Bacchi understands frames as sense-making cognitive structures used by actors who are not fully aware of shaping the impact of predefined meanings and limits of interpretation (Bacchi 2009). In this sense, it is often difficult to distinguish between intentional (strategic) and unintentional (discursive) framing as strategic framing is always embedded within the discursive one. From this perspective, critical frame analysis as applied in this article examines (re)production of meanings within particular discursive context regardless of particular actors framing. Moreover, the method gives limited understanding of frame construction processes and does not analyse implementation or effectiveness of policies. Considering the limitations, critical frame analysis still provides a concise theoretical and methodological tool to analyze the variety of interpretations and contestations of gender equality and their implications for policy design. It also addresses cultural filters that represent gender bias embedded in policies (Verloo & Lombardo 2007). As such, it is appropriate to study family policies closely linked to value systems and traditions.

For the purpose of the analysis, national policy documents and examples of parliamentary debates related to the aforementioned issues were selected, mainly laws regulating maternity, paternity and parental leave, family, employment and gender equality policy strategies, EU related documents such as national action plans for employment or programming documents for the EU Structural Support. The selected documents cover the period 2004-2014, as the main development in the area of family policies in all three countries happened only after the accession. Founded on the proposed methodology, documents

[2] The methodology of critical frame analysis was elaborated and broadly used in the European research in QUING project (Quality in Gender+ Equality Policies, www.quing.eu), which was funded within the Sixth framework Program of the European Commission (2006-2010) and covered all the EU countries, and Croatia and Turkey.

were coded using syntactic coding capturing syntactic relations of statements (Krizsan *et al.* 2011). On the basis of codes and corresponding markers, policy frames were identified and compared on national level and later on from a comparative perspective. Comparison in critical frame analysis aims at grasping the differences and detecting absences in discourses by comparing with other countries as a source of reflexivity on different meanings of gender equality (Verloo & Lombardo 2007).

Framing Gender Equality in the Domain of Family policies in Czech Republic, Lithuania and Slovakia: Context and Discourses

The EU policies on family issues mainly concern maternity and parental leave, child-care infrastructure and balancing work and family. Although, all three areas are often subsumed under the umbrella of reconciliation of work and family life and the issues are undoubtedly interrelated, for the purpose of this article we deal with them separately. The EU regulates these areas by different policies and methods: maternity and parental leave issues are governed by the EU directives and their adoption is obligatory, while child-care services and reconciliation measures at the workplace are covered by soft laws – for example, European Employment Strategy, gender equality strategies (e.g. Road Map for Equality between Women and Men, 2006-2010, and the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men, 2010-2015) and instruments such as the European Structural Funds and particularly, the Social Fund. In addition, the three areas have different transformative potential for gender equality. As aforementioned, reconciliation measures at the workplace often have debatable effects on gender equality. Child-care facilities contribute to gender equality indirectly by reducing care work but they do not challenge its distribution in the private sphere, as the three countries experienced during the socialist past. Conversely, parental leave policies, in cases in which they encourage men into care and unpaid work, transform private care structures and challenge gender labour division (Ciccia & Verloo 2012) directing society towards an ideal of "dual earner-carer" model (Gornick & Meyers 2008). This section summarizes the development of legislation and policies in the Czech Republic, Lithuania and Slovakia in the post-accession period and highlights policy framing in domestic contexts.

Family Policies and Gender Equality in the Czech Republic

The conceptualization of gender equality after the EU accession in the Czech Republic was marked mainly by the controversial process of adoption of

the Antidiscrimination Act[3] that has led to a backlash of gender equality policies. For a short period, the area of gender equality has merged into family policies and was almost reduced to the issue of reconciliation of work and family life[4]. Gender equality measures such as reconciliation of work and family life and support of fatherhood where introduced in the family policy documents[5]. Regardless of these pro-gender equality measures, the focus remained on family and care duties of a parent, usually a mother. The Concept for Support of Families with Children, for example, promotes parental care, solidarity within family and its economic self-support. In addition, the proposal of the Law on Support of Families with Children suggested the establishment of various models of private childcare, the reduction of payments to the social system by employers if parents with small children work part-time and take paternity leave. Due to changes in governments in 2009 and fiscal implications, the Act has never been adopted. Nevertheless, it influenced framing of future polices by relying mostly on free market instruments such as the flexibility of labour market and private social services.

Child-care issues have also been implemented by the so-called "pro-family package" introducing a three pace parental leave system. Parents could choose between 2-year-long[6], 3-year-long and 4-year-long parental leave. The 3-year-long leave was the most generous when it came to the total amount of financial compensation received during the parental leave. Those women who did not have income or had lower income before childbirth were automatically required to participate in the four years' scheme of parental leave. Although the pro-family package aimed at bringing choice to women and families, the promoted flexibility applied only to employed women with an adequate salary (Pavlik et al. 2008). In order to improve the system, it underwent several changes. Since 2012, all parental leave options have similar financial limits regardless their duration. The possibility to change between options was introduced and former time limits regulating hours spent in child-care facilities were repealed. Though men are entitled to benefit from parental leave, parents have to sign the agreement on change of caregiver that enhances the notion of paternal care as something unusual. Similarly to parental leave regulations that target mostly women, the concept of reconciliation of work and family life is linked with women's employment. Although policy documents often use gender

[3] The Antidiscrimination Act was adopted on the third attempt after long discussions related to its implementation on private sphere framed by neo-liberal arguments highlighted also by the President Klaus.

[4] The National Reform Program of the Czech Republic for 2008-2010 is the most illustrative policy document where gender equality occurred only in the chapter on education.

[5] Národní koncepce rodinné politiky (2005)/*National Concept for Family Policies* and Národní koncepce podpory rodin s dětmi (2008)/*National Concept for Support of Families with Children (2008*).

[6] Until the child is two years old.

neutral term 'parent', due to prevailing gender inequality in the labour market, the proposed measures have potentially different impacts on women and men, often reinforcing inequalities women face. Moreover, as in the case of childcare, the main responsibility for implementation of reconciliation lies upon employers and employees. The state supported work-life balance only through the means of the European Social Fund where it was prioritized over other gender equality aims.[7]

As visible, family policies in the Czech Republic advance family based social support and private childcare facilities instead of public ones (Krizkova *et al.* 2008). They clearly indicate a neo-liberal approach, diminishing the role of the state and promoting little interference into family matters. Non-interference of the state into family is a frequent argument in Czech family policy debates as it appeared also in the case of domestic violence legislation or the proposal of a public alimony fund (Havelkova & Cidlinska 2010). In addition to the neo-liberal discourse influencing family policies, conservative voices are present as well, either by rhetorical preference of marital family or by stigmatizing single mothers and their low social support (Havelkova & Cidlinska 2010). Hence, the neo-liberal concept of choice in the case of child-care impacts more significantly women and for many of them it remains only rhetorical. Nevertheless, in recent years, the involvement of men as target groups of gender equality increased, a working group for men and gender equality was established under the gender equality body and men's role in care duties has been emphasized in the recent gender equality strategy.

Critical frame analysis of Czech family policies proved that, despite the fact that policies encompass gender equality concepts, they promote egalitarian understanding of equality that does not consider structural inequalities women face (Ocenasova 2013). Moreover, the normativity of the male position in society is highlighted and men's involvement into care work is assumed to be special. Although progressive framing transforming domestic division of labour is present in Czech debates, it remains marginal within the implementation of policies. The egalitarian concept of equality resonates with the overall neo-liberal context of family policies in the Czech Republic that contributes to their low transformative potential. Although the main national contestation of gender equality rises from neo-liberal ideas, it is complemented by occasional conservative understanding of the family and gender roles division. The combination of the two often does not challenge unfair gender distribution of unpaid work.

[7] In the period 2007-2010 EU funded priority for Equal Opportunities of Women and Men was generally focusing on reconciliation and services for families and limited opportunities were left for projects dealing with gender equality in other ways (Pavlik *et al.* 2008).

Family Policies and Gender Equality in Lithuania

In post-accession Lithuania, political priorities shifted to social and family policies detaching them from the gender equality policy domain and sometimes conflicting with latter's objectives. Since 2004 the policy discourse of reconciliation of work and family in Lithuania was introduced in documents that tackle gender equality.[8] These documents define priorities that introduce measures to encourage female employment, including elderly women, disabled women and women after long child-care leave to re-enter the labour market, as outlined in the EU policy strategies. For example, the documents on promoting equal opportunities for women and men record the problems that women (not men) experience – high burden of care-work which negatively affects their professional competences and causes discrimination at work. The measures for better balancing paid and unpaid work include the development of criteria on a family-friendly work environment and the encouragement of employers to apply them voluntarily. The same documents outline that balanced sharing will be better achieved through awareness raising campaigns on positive fatherhood and seminars on developing skills for communication between women and men. These measures are described as an improvement for stabilising the family institution.[9] Men's role in the sharing of the paid labour and care-work is almost absent.

Analysis of debates on the parental and child benefit system suggests that Lithuanian policy makers have promoted long-term child care-leave, which affected mostly mothers and their opportunities in active employment. The threats of demographic decline and constant public discussions on the need to help families to raise their children impacted the policy development to increase child-care leave benefits since 2004. The increase in child-care leave schemes occurred by raising the paid maternity from 70% in 2004 to 100 % of the salary in 2007, until a child reached one year old. Since 2007, gradually the duration of paid child-care leave from one year to two-years was introduced. Some initiatives were present in the Parliament to justify prolongations of the parental leave as agenda of gender equality. For example, along increased duration of parental leave the policy measures on *flex-security* were proposed to allow women to combine part-time work and partial child-care leave. These provisions did not find supporters in the Parliament and were dismissed from agenda as detrimental for

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[8] Valstybinė moterų ir vyrų lygių galimybių 2005-2009 m. programa/*National Program on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men for 2005-2009*, Valstybinė moterų ir vyrų lygių galimybių 2005-2009 m. programa/*National Program on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men for 2010-2014;* Nacionalinė Lisabonos strategijos įgyvendinimo programa/*National Lisbon Strategy Implementation Program for 2005-2008*; Nacionalinės demografinės (gyventojų) politikos strategijos šeimos gerovės įgyvendinimo 2008-2010 m. Priemonių planas/*Action Plan for Implementation of National Demographic (Population) Policy Family Welfare Strategy*.

[9] National Program on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 2005-2009 and 2010-2014.

the child and mother, under the guise that she would neglect her child-care duties.[10] The dominant policy debates justified the prolongation of maternity leave up-to two years as a key means to overcome demographic decline, increase birth rate and strengthen women's role as the primary child-carers and biological and cultural reproducers of the nation.[11] Gender and family policy experts warned that the prolongation of care-leave hinders gender equality and entraps women at home causing their drop out from the labour market due to the child-care responsibilities. (Stankūniene *et al.* 2005; Maslauskaite 2004; Tereškinas & Purvaneckienė 2012; Pilinkaite Sotirovic 2014). The economic crises made an impact on slight change of schemes of the paid parental leave when legal amendments[12] provided possibilities for families to choose one-year fully paid parental leave or partially compensated two-years leave.

Research on child-care infrastructure shows limited access and underdeveloped services in Lithuania in the post-accession period (Stankuniene & Maslauskaite 2009). Though national policy documents[13] provide evidence about the lack of a complex system of services for care for children, elderly, disabled members of the family, the solution was proposed through the implementation of various projects under EQUAL in 2004-2006 and European Structural Fund program in 2007-2013. These project activities targeted women only aiming at improving their professional competences and employability through flexible child-care services (CEDAW 2011).

In 2005-2006 the law on Maternity leave and Sickness was amended by the provisions for fathers of new-borns to obtain a fully paid month of paternal leave and stay together with the mother of the child for one month. In practice, one month father's leave (paternity) overlaps with the mother's leave (maternity). Even more, the legal amendments embedded family-based paternity leave applicable solely for fathers who were married to the mother of their child.[14] In 2008, marital status of fathers was removed allowing all fathers to

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[10] Ministry of Social Security and Labour. 2006. The press release of the Ministry of Social security and Labour. Available at http://www.straipsniai.lt/mamoms/puslapis/9652
Šeštoji (327) Seimo sesija/*Minutes of the Sixth (327) Parliamentary Session.*

[11] Šeštoji (327) Seimo sesija/*Minutes of the Sixth (327) Parliamentary; Septintoji* (344) Seimo sesija/*Seventh (344) Parliamentary Session 6 November 2007*; Trisdešimt ketvirtojo (296) Seimo posėdžio stenograma/Minutes of the Thirty Fourth (296) Parliamentary Sessions on the Amendments to the Articles 19, 20 and 21 of Law on Sickness and Maternity/Paternity Leave No. XP-2249; May 17, 2007

[12] LR Ligos ir motinystės socialinio draudimo įstatymas/*Law on Sickness and Maternity Social Insurance*, No. IX-110, May 9, 2013.

[13] National Program for Women and Men 2005-2009, National Program for Women and Men 2010-2014.

[14] LR Ligos ir motinystės socialinio draudimo įstatymo papildymo 18(1), 18(2), 18(3) straipsniais įstatymas/*Amendments to the articles 18 (1), 18 (2), 18 (3) of Law on Sickness and Maternity leave,* No. XP-874, 08/06/2006.

take paternity leave.[15] Thus, provisions for fathers to take parental leave were transformed to validate traditional gender role division and traditional family model rather than as a measure of the gender equality agenda in Lithuania. For example, the national gender equality documents indicate the necessity to encourage men to share care responsibilities and propose both awareness raising campaigns on positive fatherhood and training courses on development of complementary dialogue between women and men.[16]

In addition, marriage received preferential treatment. No other form of cohabitation is legally regulated. The strong emphasis on the marital model of family became predominant in the discussions on family policies since 2007. The Concept of State Family Policies, adopted in 2008, reduced family to married spouses and their children. The change of the definition was justified by the claim that marriage represents, historically and scientifically the most stable institution for the overall development of an individual. As a consequence, state support to families would be provided only to defined families and disqualifies other family forms and can lead to the social exclusion of children living in other family forms, mainly single mother's households. In 2011 the Constitutional Court ruled that the concept of family based on marriage between a woman and a man as defined in the Law on State Family Concept is not in compliance with the provisions of the Constitution (Constitutional Court 2011). Nevertheless, in 2012 the Ministry of Social Security and Labour initiated an awareness raising campaign "Let's protect marriage and we will save Lithuania" (*Apsaugokime santuoką – išsaugosime Lietuvą*) with the purpose to strengthen married couples that can ensures stabile families, demographic growth and national security.[17]

This brief overview on framing care-related policies in Lithuania suggests the highly contested concept of gender equality policy content due to contradicting policy developments. On the one hand, policy developments of equal opportunities for women and men encourage both women's public roles in employment and men's caring duties through father's leave provision. However, provisions of father's leave interwoven together with maternity leave articulate father's role as a helper for child-care rather than a main caregiver. On the other hand, regardless of the commitments to follow gender equality, the national policy actors articulate the concepts to reinforce women's traditional role as wife, mother and care-giver. The strong emphasis on the family

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15 In 2008 these discriminatory provisions on family status were changed.

16 National Program on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 2010-2014.

17 Baltic news service, 2012. *SADM užsakė plakatų s ušūkiu „Apsagokime santuoką, išsaugosime Lietuvą už 247 tūkst.Litų* (Ministry of Social Security and Labour financed campaign „Lets'protect marriage and we will safe Lithuania") http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/sadm-uzsake-plakatu-su-sukiu-apsaugokime-santuoka-issaugosime-lietuva-uz-247-tukst-lt.d?id=56684577#ixzz27J3yErYn

institution as the main care giving body suggests the reproduction of gender inequality and strengthening the dual burden for women as a worker and carer. This suggest the perception that in Lithuania gender equality policies are incorporated in the field of the labour market and separated from the family policy area.

Family Policies and Gender Equality in Slovakia

The significant development of gender equality policies in Slovakia happened only after 2007[18] when new gender equality infrastructure and strategy were created. The government also adopted the strategy for reconciliation of work and family life, which, however, did not consist of reporting and compliance measures, but rather represented rhetorical support for the issue. Nevertheless, the reconciliation found its way into gender equality strategies and action plans and to the amendment of a family concept. The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family promotes it through the Competition of "Family, gender and equal opportunities friendly employer". Reconciliation of work and family life in Slovakia is closely related to child-care services and employment of women as reconciliation measures are often paired with measures facilitating women's return to the labour market after parental leave. Thus women are at the centre of the problem in the reconciliation policy discourse. It is women who, due to child-care, experience their limited opportunities to catch with men on equal footing. Paternity leave is not regulated and was shortly discussed only as a complementary option to maternal care during the child's first month. As such, reconciliation policy reproduces traditional family arrangements where women are the primary care givers.

The regulations of parental allowances underwent several changes. First, in 2005 paid employment was allowed for a parent unlimitedly while receiving parental allowances. However, in 2009 two types of benefits were introduced: the parental allowance for parents staying at home with fairly limited possibility to work and the reimbursement of childcare expenses for working parents. Moreover, two tracks of parental allowances were introduced depending on participation in the social insurance scheme (the allowances were higher for those socially insured). In 2010, even the limited income on parental leave was banned. In 2011, the system returned to the situation in 2005 and parental allowances[19] are provided to all parents until the child reaches three years of

[18] In the pre-accession period gender equality agenda merged into general antidiscrimination. In the post-accession it was subsumed for several years under family policies, the fact symbolically represented by the renaming of the gender equality body to the Department for Family and Gender Policies.

[19] Parental allowance is based on unitary system and is lower than minimal wage.

age, while the alternative – the reimbursement for childcare – is still available. In addition, the maternity leave was increased from 55% to 60% of a compensated wage in 2011 and to 65% in 2012, plus a paid activity of a person on maternity leave that is allowed.[20] Policy debates accompanying these changes were framed by different, often competing frames, which can be summarized into three categories. In pro-gender equality arguments, support to women's employment and developing of their working competences was highlighted. Other actors supported paid activity of mothers on parental leave as a means to improve economic conditions of a family. Contrary, conservative voices argued for the preservation of traditional gender roles and emphasized family (maternal) care as an ideal for child's development.

Despite positive arrangements allowing the combination of child-care and work, its implementation in practice is fairly limited. There is a significant lack of public child-care facilities for children under three years of age and even those existent are not subjected to state control, as these facilities do not belong to the competencies of any of the ministries. The state thus directly supports long parental leave undertaken mostly by mothers. The imbalance of sharing unpaid duties in families is rarely problematised, nevertheless, women are encouraged to become active in the labour market. Although demographic arguments supporting traditional gendered norms are rare, matrimonial family is presented as an ideal institution for the wellbeing of children and contributing to societal stability, often degrading other family arrangements. Moreover, according to recent conservative voices, traditional family requires special protection, as it is currently threatened by gender equality discourse and policies of the European Union. The rise of conservative discourse related to family and gender equality resulted in recent amendment of the Constitution ensuring state support to marriage defined narrowly as a relationship between a man and a woman. The preferential treatment of marriage is also present in the Family Law allowing for certain social benefits and child adoption only to married couples.

The debates on gender equality in family policies consists of contradicting viewpoints promoting maternal care of small children, support to families as a unit and promotion of matrimonial arrangements contested by neo-liberal arguments based on support to employed and self-sufficient citizens. Gender equality standpoints arguing for more balanced division of unpaid labour and increase of child-care services are present in political debates only if gender equality strategy is concerned. Critical frame analysis of documents and debates proved that although reconciliation and parental leave policies are framed by gender equality, it is understood mostly as equal opportunities for women rather

[20] Zakon c. 513/2010 Z.z., ktorym sa meni a doplna zakon c. 571/2009 Z.z. o rodicovskom prispevku a o doplneni niektorych zakonov a o zmene a doplneni zakona c. 561/2008 Z.z. o prispevku na starostlivost o dieta (*Amending Acts on Parental Allowance and Child Care Benefits*).

than challenging male position and traditional gender role distribution (Ocenasova 2013). Power relations in private sphere and patriarchal norms in care are rarely questioned. In addition, the conservative discourse becomes the most significant source of contestation of gender equality in general, nevertheless, with practical impact mainly on family policies' design.

Comparative Analysis of Czech, Lithuanian and Slovak Care Policy Debates and Europeanization Effects

The following section compares care policies and discourses underlying them in the Czech Republic, Lithuania and Slovakia and suggests grasping diverse rather than uniform gender equality meanings and outcomes of the Europeanization process. We will start with the comparison of domestic discourses on parental leave, reconciliation and childcare facilities and identify the main sources supporting and contesting gender equality. Further on, we will point out the Europeanization effects on domestic debates.

From the comparative perspective, the biggest differences in policy arrangements can be found in parental leave policies. In the Czech Republic, parental leave is based on flexibility and individual choice between duration of the leave and financial income. Slovakia provides low parental benefits but does not restrain paid activity. Contrary, Lithuania rewards care relatively equally to employment with limited possibilities to work. Our research based on the analysis of policy frames shows that in all three countries, parental leave measures target primarily women as traditional care-givers. In some cases, if leave is problematized, women's absence from the labour market, their lower employability and limited pension and social security benefits are recognized, but proposed solutions target women and their role to get equal footing with men in paid work. Men's involvement in child-care is not discussed as a potential for gender equality. It is presented rather as something exceptional. However, its articulation slightly differs in the compared countries. For example, in the Czech Republic, debates on father's involvement in early childcare articulates father's role as a distinct one. Though Lithuania introduced paternity leave, it was articulated in terms of improvement of parents' capacities to develop emotional ties with their children, help the mother in caring duties and fostering harmonious family model to strengthen family values in society.[21] In Slovakia, male involvement into family tasks is not included into policies at all. As a result, though parental leave is articulated as a women's issue in each

[21] Nacionalinė demografinės (gyventojų) politikos strategijos šeimos gerovės įgyvendinimo priemonių įgyvendinimo 2008-2010 metų ataskaita/*Report on Implementation of National Demographic (Population) Strategy and Family Welfare Action Plan for 2008-2010/*June 30, 2011, pp. 7-10. Minutes of the Sixth (327) Parliamentary Session.

country, its framing defers depending on values underlining the argument. Conservative interpretations consider parental leave as women's natural duty and/or role in society. According to the other policy discourses parental leave constitutes a barrier in women's employment and economic independence.

The comparison of the three countries suggests that policy discourses on parental leave recognize the inevitability of women's temporary leave from the labour market for child-rearing and uneven sharing of care between women and men, but do not transform or problematize the gendered power relations underlying it. Instead, by admitting women's constrained experience due to childbirth and childcare, policies aim at protecting and compensating women for their absence in the labour market. Following feminist theoretical research on discursive analysis, the meaning of gender equality in the debates on parental leave in all three countries is fixed to recognize and value women's non-hegemonic identity, which is different in comparison to male normative identities (Lombardo *et al.* 2009; Meier et al. 2007). Introduction of father's leave in Lithuania and their involvement into care in the Czech Republic stretched the equality goals to family domain by introducing possibilities of sharing childcare, but interpretations of father's involvement in care activities were not translated to the transformation of the hegemonic patriarchal norms.

Reconciliation of work and family duties in all three countries becomes the instrument for compensating women rather than empowering them. The reconciliation as a concept was introduced simultaneously with the EU accession, and transformed to domestic contexts in the field of access to childcare, family-friendly working environment and flexible working arrangements. Policy documents addressing work and care commitments highlight women as a group who faces a problem of reconciliation that hinders their participation and equal rights in the labour market[22]. Thus, the proposed solutions target women with the goal to reintegrate them to the labour market after maternity leave, improve their professional skills and employability through flexible childcare services and working arrangements. In Slovakia and Lithuania, the reconciliation concept is included in both, gender equality and family policies. Nevertheless, its conceptualization depends on the type of policy – in gender equality documents it is articulated along the lines of women's participation in the labour market, economy and independence, while family policies define reconciliation as a mean to support families, their stability and economic situation. Often, gender equality measures are used to validate traditional gender role division and to foster the traditional family.

[22] E.g. Gender Equality Action Plan for the Years 2014-2019 (Slovakia), Report on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in 2010 in the Czech Republic, National Program on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 2010-2014 and Action Plan for Implementation of National demographic (population) policy strategy in Lithuania.

As the main Europeanization area of family policies, reconciliation of work and family life was rarely debated in the studied states. Contrary, the analysis of the policy discourses in these three countries suggests that the EU conceptualization of reconciliation and its understanding resonates in national policy discourses as it often corresponds with domestic "cultural" settings. Though the reconciliation initially aimed at promoting gender equality, the policies did not challenge domestic gender regimes as shown above. In addition, the analysis suggests that the implementation of reconciliation measures relies mainly on employers and employees in all three countries, fact that again resonates with general neo-liberal arrangements of the labour market. The initiative to organize competition and award family-friendly employers became the important reconciliation policy action in Slovakia and Lithuania implemented by the state institutions. Both nation states show their appreciation towards work-life measures at workplace[23]. In the Czech Republic, the tasks were completely delegated to employers and solely supported by EU funds. The framing of reconciliation of work and family life fitted well into the Czech neo-liberal discourse arguing for low interference of the state into family matters and leaving the responsibility to private actors as apparent also in childcare policies. As a result, reconciliation as the most resonating and the least contradicting gender equality policy was prioritized in the Czech Republic. Very recently more progressive framing of the reconciliation issue occurred; it acknowledges the economic value of unpaid work[24] and more equal sharing of domestic care work.[25]

Moreover, policies on other aspects of family related matters such as child-care services suggest that neo-liberal norms of market often oppose values of equality. Though all three countries define the possibilities to combine leave and paid activities[26], the lack of care facilities for the smallest children represents a significant obstacle for parents to stay active in the labour market. The scarcity of childcare facilities is perceived as a problem, and the solution is often delegated from the state to the market, employers, communities or

[23] Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family in Slovakia and Ministry of Social Security and Labour in Lithuania (this particular measure is introduced in the National Program on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men for 2010-2014).

[24] Gender Equality Action Plan for the Years 2014-2019 (Slovakia), Strategy for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in Czech Republic for the Years 2014-2020

[25] Strategy for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in Czech Republic for the Years 2014-2020.

[26] In Lithuania the scheme for maternity/paternity leave were changed in 2010. According to the new regulations, a parent taking child-care is allowed to choose either one-year fully paid child care leave without possibility to work or two-years leave with the possibility for part-time work during the second year of leave, distributing social benefits as to 70 percent of compensated salary in the first year, and 40 percent – in the second year. LR Ligos ir motinystės socialinio draudimo įstatymo 5,6,17,20 ir 21 straipsnių pakeitimo įstatymas/ *Amendments of the Articles 5, 6,17,20 and 21 of the Law on Sickness and Maternity leave Social Insurance* /No. XP-2048, June 5, 2012.

families. If looking at the framing of childcare services issue, it varies across countries. While Lithuania and Slovakia favour family care,[27] the Czech Republic relies upon private facilities and market regulation[28]. Although the shortage of childcare services as an issue is often framed as an obstacle to gender equality[29] and work-life balance[30] that is in line with the EU framing, proposed solutions denote rather anti-equality character. Redistribution of care to families belongs to the conservative model of the familialism, which is based on inherited unequal division of gender roles. Privatization and market regulation of care services is underlined by neo-liberal norms favouring economically active and self-responsible citizens. Although a certain degree of familialism is present in all three studied countries, it strongly underlines policies in Lithuania and Slovakia, while the Czech Republic at least rhetorically shifts towards de-familialism that is also apparent by its enhanced attention to fatherhood.

The effects of the Europeanization process of care policies in the studied country cases varied according to particular policy areas. Contrary to expectations, parental leave, the sole issue regulated by the EU legislation, was impacted the least by Europeanization besides the initial opening of maternity and parental leave to men. Arrangement of maternity, paternity and parental leave is considered to be a family issue governed by the national states. Debates on parental leave are often detached from the issue of work-life balance (except the Czech Republic) and are underlined rather by family wellbeing and demographic growth (Lithuania) than gender equality. Similarly, despite the pressure of the Barcelona targets, child-care policy debates rarely refer to it and situate the issue within exclusive domestic competencies. Analysis of gender equality documents suggests that the issue with the highest degree of Europeanization is the area of work-life balance as it was introduced to the studied countries mostly by the EU soft law. In line with the EU framing, the national policy discourses interpreted the reconciliation as support to women's participation in

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[27] Childcare facilities up to the age of three are not even regulated on state level in Slovakia. In Lithuania the documents of the Ministry of Education clearly define family as the best institution for care. However, they point to the needs for improvement of child-care services. For detailed description see: Tereskinas & Puvaneckiene 2012, 38-41.

[28] In the Czech Republic, the proposal of the Act on Family Support introduces various measures of private childcare; considering public facilities it follows the Slovak example.

[29] E.g. Slovak National Gender Equality Strategy for the Years 2009-2012. In Lithuania the sociologists constantly highlight this issue (Tereskinas & Purvaneckiene 2012). For example, the Action Plan for Implementation of National demographic (population) policy strategy in the field of family welfare for 2011-2013 proposes measures for better reconciliation of work and family duties (measure no. 1-2), improve child-care service infrastructure (no. 3) and implement measures to strengthen families and foster traditional values (no. 9).

[30] E.g. the Czech National Concept for Support of Families with Children.

the labour market and facilitating the combination of their paid and unpaid work. Gendered distribution of tasks in family, however, remained overlooked.

In the case of the conceptualization of work-life balance we found successful social learning as part of the Europeanization process. Schimmelfenning and Sedelmeier (2005) proposed some criteria for positive Europeanization which includes relevance to domestic context, "cultural match" with values, legitimacy of rules and their clarity. By introducing reconciliation policies, the EU addressed problems relevant also to our studied national states and this fact facilitated the integration of the issue into domestic policy making. Regarding legitimacy and clarity, the EU conceptualization of the issue presents several discrepancies as it is framed by competing discourses of economy, demography and equality. Nevertheless, despite expected reluctance towards policy adoption of unclear rules as suggested by Schimmelfenning and Sedelmeier (2005), in the case of work-life balance diverse framing contributed to successful Europeanization in all three examined countries. Loose EU conceptualization of the reconciliation issue allowed for "stretching and bending" of this concept so it fits the national situation. As a result, it matches dominant domestic cultural values as reconciliation can be interpreted along the lines of neo-liberal economy and in the post socialist context it does not challenge traditional gender division of paid and unpaid work.

Conclusion

Comparative critical frame analysis has focused on both problem representations and proposed policy solutions in the Czech Republic, Lithuania and Slovakia. Although the analysis of policy measures corresponds with the existing literature, if combined with critical frame analysis of discourses, it challenges country clustering as presented by Javornik, particularly in the case of Lithuania. In depth analysis of discourses in fact unveiled significant similarities in care family policies' framing. Critical frame analysis of parental leave, child care and reconciliation policy discourses in the Czech Republic, Lithuania and Slovakia suggests the appropriation of gender equality concepts to articulate traditional gender regime regardless the recognition of gender differences and unequal statuses in the labour market. In addition, our analysis confirms Liebert's argument on attitudes hindering gender equality. In the studied country cases, gender equality was contested either from a neo-liberal point of view, or by traditional understandings of gendered roles. Policies target mostly women and their role in childbearing is conceptualized as a barrier to their full participation in the labour market. This suggests that the gendered imbalance of sharing unpaid duties is not problematized and inequality in the private sphere is not considered in family policy debates. Conversely, if

reinforced by conservative and gender neutral discourses of family, care and traditional gender tasks policies reproduce gender inequality. Main domestic contestation of gender equality in the domain of family policies in all three country cases arose from both, neo-liberal egalitarian understanding of equality as well as from traditional conservative definitions of family and gender divisions. Nevertheless, the degree of their appearance varied. In the Czech Republic, neo-liberal norms are predominant and the concept of the reconciliation of work and family was prioritised, as it does not contradict the dominant role of market and low interference of the state into the family matters. Conservative arguments only contributed to gender-neutral debate of reconciliation by underlying the 'importance' of the family. Contrary, in Slovakia and Lithuania, conservative discourse preserving traditional family with clearly defined gender roles prevails and affects family policies. Nevertheless, if gender equality underlines policy debates, it is often narrowed down to equal opportunities in employment, reproducing not only existing gender power structures but also underpinning the neo-liberal understanding of the responsible and self-sufficient citizen.

Europeanization happens in family policies despite the fact that this domain is primarily under the competences of national states. Nevertheless, domestic context and actors are more influential and transform EU concepts and policies so they fit into national settings. Those EU concepts and policies were translated into domestic settings, which resonate the most or do not contest existing gender regimes. As a result, gender equality norms in family policies are often understood as related mainly to women, which corresponds to the EU articulation of gender equality issues related to family and employment. In the case of our examined country cases, gender equality framing of family policies was adopted mainly in the scope of gender equality policies while in family policies the concepts were often absorbed into the traditional family discourse (with certain exceptions, as the Czech Republic). As such, their gender equality character is questioned and the coexistence of contesting concepts in family policies framed by equality (reconciliation) as well as by traditional gender division of roles (long or highly compensated parental leave) undermines their implementation. It could be concluded that Europeanization of gender equality affects family policies in all three countries by the inclusion of fathers to care-work, protecting and promoting women in the labour market through the affordability of child-care services. However, significant deficits of the EU conceptualization of gender equality in these areas could be identified also in all country cases. Despite the fact that identified problems are of high relevance to national states, the conceptualization of gender equality and competing norms underlying family policies compromise their coherency and allow for various interpretations. As a result, concepts are easily introduced to domestic contexts as their meaning can be adjusted to existing discourses. Nevertheless, the already

compromised gender equality goal of the EU care policies is even more twisted if combined with discourses hindering gender equality. Domestic neo-liberal settings reinforce the notion of masculine normativity of the labour market embedded in the EU policies and create space for delegation of the state's responsibilities to private actors. Implicit focus on women contest traditional notions of gender roles only to a certain extent and in the context of the former socialist states, the full employment of women being easy to be incorporated into the conservative discourse preserving the traditional family model.

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