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Reconciliation of Work and Family Life in Hungary

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Abstract

The paper analyses the 'Europeanization' of policies concerning the reconciliation of work and family life in Hungary between 1998 and 2005. It looks at how politicians – in government or in the opposition – framed European requirements and/or standards and how they used references to European processes in their arguments. The paper distinguished three periods of Europeanization. In the first period – in which the first comprehensive Family Support Act was adopted – basically no reference was made to the European Union. Accordingly, this Act – its goal being to protect the institution of the family to ensure demographic growth – did not prioritize reconciliation and women's employment at all and was criticized of not being in line with European principles. The second period before 2004 was the period of legal harmonization. Therefore, reconciliation-related acts (e.g. on telework) were mainly adopted as an answer to European expectations. Finally, in the third period after the 2004 accession, the reconciliation of work and family life became an explicit goal of the government, usually with references made to European processes and European principles. In this period, MPs started using the jargon of the EU. Furthermore, the availability of European funding was an important trigger of reconciliation-related reforms..

Keywords

Reconciliation, Europeanization, Family policy, Actors

Introduction

Work and family life have been the center of debate for a long time and yet they still appear to be two fairly distinct and sometimes incompatible realms. However, there are increasing efforts to resolve the possible tensions and redefine the obligations and responsibilities that will allow a united life course for any individual or household. The policies generally emphasize the gender division of labor but there are other areas which these policies are targeting as well. First, the labor market participation of women has been on a rise in almost all advanced countries. Second, the family forms have been changing, and more and more nucleus family is becoming the standard. Third, the population is ageing, hence there are more people requiring elderly care. And finally the birth rates are declining, the fertility rates are dropping, therefore the demographic pressures are at play (Crompton, 1999). In response to these developments, several solutions have been offered such as flexible work or time arrangements, provision of services by public and private sector, and a more equal distribution of paid and unpaid work (Hantrais, 2000). All of these aim to maintain the life and work balance with different emphases on different aspects of the problem. Since a broad range of policies are available, many countries adopted different set of instruments. Due to a weak competence at a European Union (EU) level, national strategies are not fully harmonized.

Existing documents from EU institutions link the reconciliation of work and family policies to mainly gender issues. Therefore, in most of these documents, reconciliation has a dual objective, first encumbering discrimination in the workplace, and second assisting women with families to manage work and domestic obligations. Nevertheless, reconciliation policies should be understood in a more extensive manner. Many people are affected by the balance of work and domestic life; hence the stakeholders extend well beyond the female labor market participants and the spillovers reach to the entire society. It has been argued that especially the work-life balance policies are prone to influence from the EU and its strong promotion of gender equality policies and the gender mainstreaming strategy (Rubery, 2002). Thus, it is noteworthy to look at the impact of European policy processes on national policy-making with regards to reconciliation and examine whether Europeanization occurs at the discursive level.

The term of Europeanization has multiple meanings. In his influential article, Olsen (2003) develops five major interpretations. Firstly, Europeanization can be seen as the territorial expansion of Europe, which is mainly associated with the enlargement process. Secondly, Europeanization refers to the supra-national institution building and how this is interrelated to national and local structures. Thirdly, it can be understood as the influence of the European institutions on domestic establishments and policies. Fourthly, Europeanization can be related to the adoption of European institutions and models by non-European countries. Fifthly, it can be grasped as the degree of unification and strength of political entity among the European countries (Olsen, 2003). These interpretations all reflect a somewhat top-down perspective and do not consider the bottom-up aspects of Europeanization: the different “usages of Europe” by national political actors (Jacquot, 2009).

However, as Schmidt and Radaelli (2004, 377) argue, Europeanization has an “inter-subjective quality”, which means that “adaptational pressure is not an external ‘objective’ entity, but it is constructed in EU and domestic political discourses”. In this sense, domestic actors do not simply adapt their policies and discourses to European requirements and goals, but they also re-construct and re-define these goals and use them in their own national context. This process can be labeled as the “usage” of Europe that

“covers practices and political interactions, which redefine themselves by seizing the European Union as a set of opportunities – whether they are institutional, ideological, political or organizational. These practices and political interactions happen as the actors go back and forth between the European level and the level on which they act (or wish to act), creating a context of interaction and reciprocal influence” (Jacquot, 2009, 21).

In other words, the influence of Europe also emanates from the shifts in national policy thinking. When politicians integrate the concepts and categories that have been formulated and widely used by the European Union into the domestic debates, we can talk about a cognitive shift. This could also involve extending the frame of reference to the Union and pushing aside the conventional domestic policy approaches. For example, according to Zeitlin (2005), the strongest influence of soft governance instruments on national social and employment policies comes through a creative appropriation by domestic actors. These actors strategically employ the concepts, guidelines, and indicators for their own interest and use them for their own leverage (Zeitlin, 2005).

Relying on this interpretation of the concept of Europeanization, the paper has a bottom-up approach, which mostly speaks to the cultural and ideological analysis. This pays attention to the ways in which political actors take advantage of the European project, especially by mobilizing other actors through changing a policy discourse (Howell, 2002). Although the Hungarian national reconciliation regime has been a rather stable one compared to the other post-transition countries, the main alterations are also rooted in the debates about the fit to a European model.

This paper will thus analyze the Europeanization of policies concerning the reconciliation of work and family life in Hungary between 1998 and 2005. It will look at how politicians – in government or in the opposition – framed European requirements and/or standards and how they used references to European processes in their arguments. The paper specifically looks at the adoption and various modifications of the Family Support Act and several other legislative acts in the social and employment field. It shows that while at the adoption of the Family Support Act basically no reference was made to the European Union, its modifications and the adoption of various other laws after 2001 can be explicitly linked to EU legislation and/or soft processes such as the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). Accordingly, the 1998 version of the Family Support Act – its goal being to protect the institution of the family to ensure demographic growth – did not prioritize women’s employment at all and was criticized of not being in line with European principles. In contrast, later provisions aim to enhance women’s employment and the reconciliation of work and family life.

The next section will briefly summarize the literature on reconciliation policies in the European Union as well as outlines the main features of the Hungarian reconciliation regime. In addition, the role of the European Union in influencing national policies will be also discussed in this section. The third part of the paper will analyze the usages of Europe for reconciliation reforms by distinguishing specific time periods based on the analysis of parliamentary debates. The final section will present the conclusions.

Reconciliation in Europe and in Hungary

In the European context, family policy has been a major subject and most of the member states give reconciliation top priority. Although it has been on the agenda of the European Communities since the 1980s, several aspects have been added to the reconciliation instruments much later. For example, in 1980s, most of the debate was around combining the work and family life for women. Later on, the distribution of paid and unpaid labor has gained importance (Vougiouka, 2004). Furthermore, as a demand of employers, flexibility, labor cost cuts, and higher competition were carried to the center of the reconciliation discussions. The gendered division of labor was aimed to be equalized and more opportunities to females were aimed to be provided. In EU documents, gender equality is almost taken as a synonym of reconciliation policies, although as mentioned before, these policies are multifaceted. This importance of reconciliation policies in the EU “can be explained by the EU’s historically strong focus on labor market policies combined with the absence of a clear competence in family policy” (Meier et al., 2007, 110).

An important step in reconciliation policies on the EU level was the adoption of the parental leave directive (Council of the European Union, 1996), which obliged member states to implement family related employment policies. This directive entitles both mothers and fathers to a three month leave when they give birth or adopt a child. This was also intended to raise the possibilities of reconciling work and family life, and a more balanced division of labor between men and women.

Currently, the main framework for reconciliation policies at a European level is the Lisbon Strategy, which has the goal of increasing women’s labor force participation to 60%. The Barcelona European Council defined one way to achieve this by setting the aim of providing childcare to at least 33% of children under age of three and to at least 90% of children between age three and mandatory school age by 2010 (Council of the European Union, 2002). These targets also became part of the Lisbon Strategy. A European support for reconciliation policies is also pronounced by a Communication of the European Commission on a better work-life balance (European Commission, 2008).

Nevertheless, these frameworks have not led to a full convergence of the national reconciliation systems. Women taking more responsibility in the labor market and men more actively engaging in domestic duties are usually understood as a positive development in terms of gender equality. However, this still leaves a lot of room for the individual countries and each member state can implement a combination of distinct tools. Specifically, Hungary’s family policy remains to be

characterized by long leave options from labor market for females, and few child care provisions outside the home. Accordingly, reconciliation discourses in Hungary are relatively marginal and often concern the difficulties women face when re-entering the labor market after long maternity leaves (Meier et al., 2007, 110).

Figure 1 provides the part-time and full-time employment rates for Hungary over the period of 1995-2007. As can be seen from the figure, the female full-time employment rate to the male full-time employment rate has been stable over the years, with a slight decrease during the second half of 1990s. The part-time employment of females, on the other hand, has shown frequent fluctuations and the women are on average twice more likely to be employed in a part-time job. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the part-time employment in Hungary constitutes less than 3% of the total employment. The economic activity rate of females in Hungary is estimated to be especially low and for the latest year it is recorded around 73% of males. Besides, the unemployment rate of females surpassed the male unemployment rate since 2004 while before this year the women were relatively at an advantage. Lastly, the ratio of female to male earned income is around 64% indicating a big gender gap.

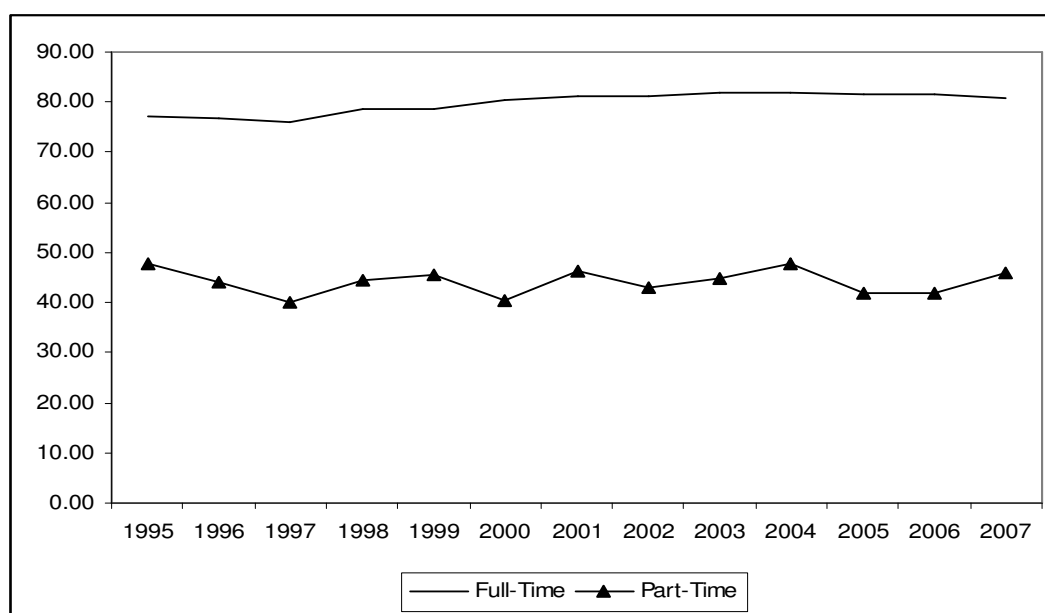


Figure 1. Part-Time and Full-Time Employment of Females as a Ratio of Males

Source: OECD

In general, there are two main approaches to the increased labor market participation of women. On the one hand, according to the conservative view, women's participation in the labor market is seen as the root cause of the tensions between family and work. It has been also affirmed that there is a tradeoff between

seeking a career and having a family, and more and more women are choosing their career paths to having children. As a result, the birth rates are declining, and the demographic balance is shifting. The conservative approach focuses on traditional values and norms, which attribute the responsibility of reproduction to women. On the other hand, in the liberal view, the family and work responsibilities should be more equally distributed between women and men. The main question of concern is the ageing population and the decreasing labor force due to a decline in birth rates. This is a major trouble for all European countries because it severely affects their growth potential. Thus, reconciliation policies according to this view are formed around the objectives of preventing demographic and growth reductions. However, how these will be achieved is open to interpretation and a cluster of instruments could be employed to this end. These debates are also present in the Hungarian context. Indeed, the fertility rates have been declining since 1990s but there was a slow reversal by 2005. Figure 2 shows the fertility rates and since 1980s in a number of transition countries. The current fertility rate is 1.3, which is equal to the regional average but below the EU-27 average, which was recorded as 1.53 in 2006, or the natural replacement rate of 2.1.

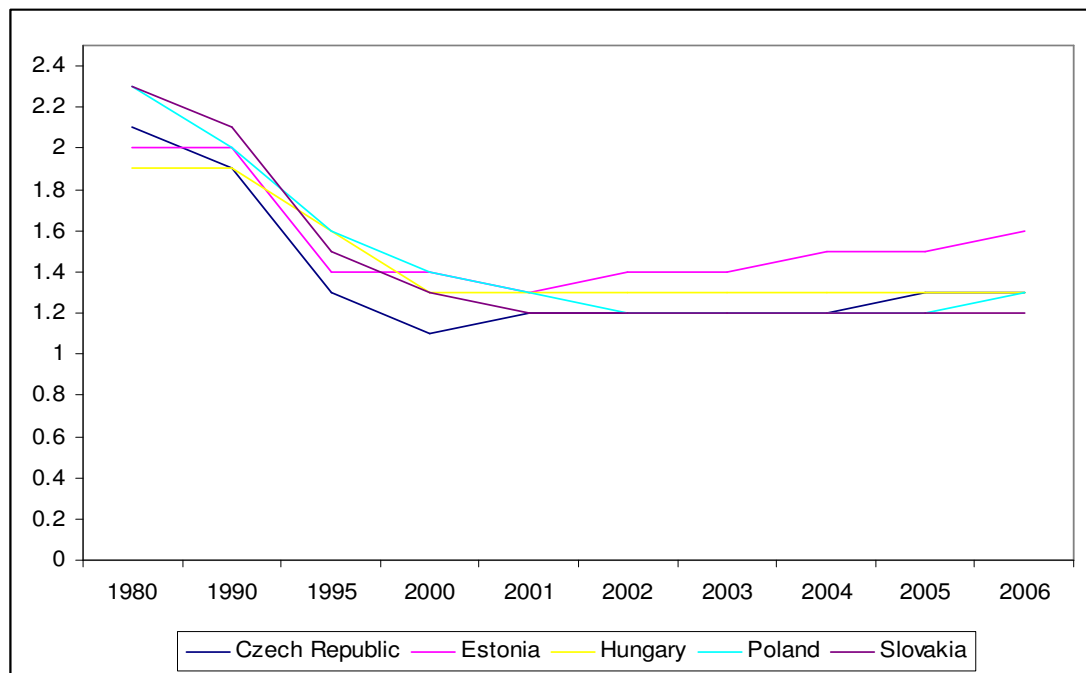


Figure 2. Total Fertility Rates over Years

Source: Eurostat

In Hungary, family provisions and childcare institutions date back to 1960s, and by 1980s the cash benefits in those areas reached 4% of the GDP. Until recently, the main tenets of the system remained the same but there have been several

adjustments in terms of the amounts received and eligibility. The family support system has the following pillars: a universal family allowance, which also includes child care support, an employment-and wage related benefit (GYED), and a flat-rate childcare allowance (GYES). These latter two benefits can be received by parents or grandparents until the child reaches the age of 3. The 2005 reform made it possible for parents to receive the GYES even if both of them are employed.

Family policies have a very wide range of impact since households with children in Hungary form almost half of the total households. In addition, family policies affect the households without children as well, because strong family ties or future possibilities of having children make these policies relevant. When we look at the work arrangements in the family, two-earner couples continue to be the most common kind, almost amounting to 40% of all households with children. Nevertheless, this share has declined over time since the number of single parents, single-earner couples, and nonworking pairs have increased (Hemmings, 2007).

Family policies combined significantly affect women's decisions on labor market participation. Despite the lack of longitudinal data on employment record of women with children, indirect indicators point towards a high rate of inactivity among Hungarian women with children. Figure 3 shows the employment rates of women with and without children for years 2000 and 2006.

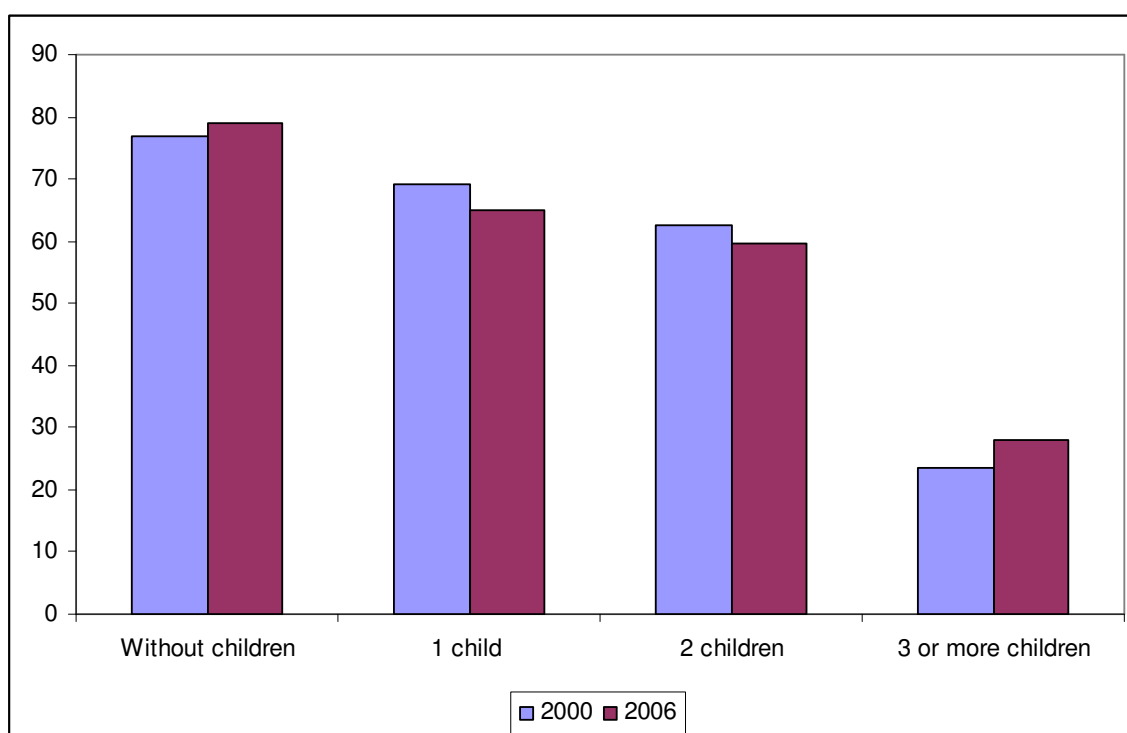


Figure 3. Employment Rate by Number of Children

Source: UNECE

Like in any other country, the family policies in Hungary are also affected by its policy legacy, interest groups, political alliances, and external pressures. As it will be shown in the following analysis, different political actors approach reconciliation policies very differently. Consequently, European and other external influences are also relayed through them differently: different actors “use” Europe in various ways. As far as other external ‘pressures’ are concerned, during the earlier years of transformation the country was heavily influenced by recommendations from the World Bank and the IMF. Both of these institutions played a significant role in shaping not only the economic policies but also social policies. The European Union at that stage agreed with these arrangements, and did not push for the more active involvement of government (Ferge, 2002).

Nevertheless, these international organizations were not particularly concerned about reconciliation policies. In Hungary, female labor force participation was quite high – like in other socialist countries – before the transition and the country experienced a dramatic decline after the regime change. However, the World Bank or the IMF did not offer direct responses to these challenges. From mid-1990s and onwards, with the accession process, the European Union became more influential, also in the field of gender equality. Later on, the Hungarian political agenda was also influenced by the Union’s stress on poverty and social exclusion, and these found some space in the political debates in 2000s. For example, day care services have been largely ignored in Hungary until 2003. Only after this date, the significance of care institutions outside the home has been realized. It has been claimed that European Union played a major role in making the Hungarian governments to recognize that female participation is highly contingent on the type of the family policies applied. Against this background, the following section presents the main usages of Europe in Hungarian debates in relation to reconciliation policies. The analysis is based on the minutes of the parliamentary debates of legislative acts that can be related to the theme of the reconciliation of work and family life.

The Usages of Europe in Hungary

Creating a Strong Nation Joining the EU: the Discourse of the 1998 Family Support Act and its Amendment in 2001

In Hungary, in the early 1990s, thus in the first period of the transition, while EU accession was always an important event to look forward to, legal harmonization and thus the direct influence of EU legislation was not too strong. Instead, the dominant EU-related discourse – that can be labeled as ‘cognitive’ Europeanization (Ferge and Juhász 2004) – was that of “catching up” with EU standards and “reaching the level” of European policies, especially in employment and social inclusion. This could be seen, for example, from debates preceding the adoption of the Employment Act (1991), the Social Act (1993), and the Child Protection Act (1997). Here the reference to European standards served a legitimating function. Interestingly, throughout the debates prior to the 1999 amendment of the Employment Act and the Social Act (and to a lesser extent, preceding the adoption

of the Family Support Act in 1998), this discourse was not enacted by the government, but by the opposition: opposition speakers often argued that they do not support certain proposals because these proposals were against the norms of the European Union.

The Family Support Act was adopted in 1998 and established the first comprehensive family support system in Hungary. One of the motivations of its adoption was to counter-act the previous austerity package (1995), while it could certainly be adopted because the austerity package resulted in a relatively high economic growth. The newly designed system – which primarily supported those with employment income with an emphasis on tax benefits – was widely criticized by the opposition and the policy community. The goals were said to aim at “strengthening the ‘middle-class’, particularly the middle-class family, and of the ‘nation’” (Ferge 2001, 112). Thus, as many experts argued, this system contributed to the “impoverishment of large groups with no earner or only one low-paid earner” (Ferge and Juhász 2004, 243), thus could not solve the problem of child poverty (Ferge and Tausz 2002, Ferge and Juhász 2004, Krémer et al. 2002). Furthermore, as Ferge and Juhász (2004, 243) argued, this system was “not fully in line with the Union’s emphasis on the accommodation of family life with work, an element of the social inclusion strategy”.

The Family Support Act from 1998 does not explicitly deal with reconciliation. During the parliamentary debate of the Family Support Act, the reconciliation of work and family life was not mentioned as an important goal. Instead, the government framed its proposal as aiming at strengthening the institution of the family and contributing to demographic growth. References to the European Union were made in the context of the well-being of families in a future EU as well. As an MP from a governmental party argued:

Hungary, the Hungarian nation needs a healthy future in order to join the institutional system of the European Union as a strong and harmonious and not as an exposed and weak society. The essential preconditions for this are the healthy family and the healthy child, able in body and mind, growing up in a healthy family and being the value and treasure of the whole society. We often hear that it is not governments who will join the institutions of the European Union. On this analogy (...), in effect it is Hungarian families who will join the institutional system of the European Union! (Szászfalvi, 24.11.1998, authors’ translation).

In this logic, ‘this act can contribute to a strong and viable Hungarian nation which can find its place in the community of European nations as an equal partner’² (Szászfalvi, 24.11.1998, authors’ translation).

The Family Support Act was amended by the same government in 2001. This amendment made it possible for grandparents to receive the child care allowance instead of the parents. Nevertheless, according to the parliamentary debate, the intergenerational sharing of responsibilities or the reconciliation of work and family was not the goal of the amendment in itself. Instead, MPs from parties in the government coalition again justified the proposal primarily on demographic grounds. As the lead speaker for the proposal argued, women might postpone or not even

consider childbirth for financial or career reasons, which contributes to demographic decline. However, if grandparents can look after children instead of the mother – fathers were only mentioned by the opposition – then this demographic decline can be stopped. Within this logic, women are seen as choosing work instead of childcare almost solely due to economic reasons: they cannot afford staying at home. Nevertheless, one MP – also from a party in the coalition government – mentioned that women who return to the labor market after a long period of childrearing face problems that could be decreased by returning to their jobs earlier. Furthermore, the betterment of the financial situation of the grandparents is also referred to as a goal. Problems related to enhancing the employment of older women who are sometimes not even eligible for a minimum pension are also discussed in this context. Throughout the parliamentary debate, no reference was made to the European Union.

Using Legal Harmonization as an Argument: Pre-Accession Debates

The second period in the early 2000s can be characterized by extensive legal harmonization and the transposition of EU directives. In these years, a reference to EU requirements – and to a lesser extent to EU standards – was one of the main arguments in favor of certain proposals (important steps were, for example, the amendment of the Labor Code, the adoption of a comprehensive anti-discrimination act³, or new legal provisions on atypical forms of employment). In this period, Europeanization was more mechanic and can be best understood as a response to conditionality pressures.

A good example for this is the 2002 amendment of several laws concerning employment and social provisions. This amendment took place after the government changed in 2002 and a socialist-liberal coalition followed the conservative one. The main motive behind this series of amendments was to fulfill European requirements. Concerning the issue of reconciliation, the amendment includes new measures facilitating part-time work or a new regulation, which gives fathers five days of extra leave after their child was born. In relation to the latter, an MP from a governing party argued that this new regulation “greatly enhances the equal rights of women and men”⁴ (Béki, 12.11.2002, authors’ translation).

Similarly, the modifications of the Labor Code and several other acts in 2004 with the goal of creating a legal framework on telework were also linked to EU requirements in the parliamentary debate (though this amendment did not include the transposition of directives, only the adoption of a framework agreement). As the state secretary from the Ministry of Employment argued:

In relation to the EU agreement on telework it has to be noted that it is not a binding norm, but the European Union finds it important that member states adopt and implement agreements that are not necessarily in the form of directives. In this respect, fulfilling EU requirements on telework and adopting new national legislation can be regarded as a path-breaking endeavor even in European standards⁵ (Csizmár, 30.03.2004, authors’ translation).

The state secretary also stated that this new legal framework on telework “can facilitate the labor market participation of women, especially mothers, and of people with altered working ability that cannot leave their homes”⁶ (Csizmár, 30.03.2004, authors’ translation).

Using European Jargon and European Funds: Post-Accession Debates

Finally, in the third period, Hungary was already a member of the European Union and started to participate in informal coordination processes such as the Open Method of Coordination. The membership had significant consequences on policy practices: there was a need for administrative changes as well as for establishing procedures for developing medium-term strategic ‘plans’. This practice of planning and coordination has been relatively new and has also had an important impact on the spreading of both EU policy jargon and EU policy principles in Hungarian policy discourses (Krizsan and Zentai 2006). As Lendvai (2004) argues, the EU has a very important role in the transformation of post-communist welfare:

The open method of co-ordination (OMCs), and specifically the Joint Inclusion Memorandum, are important exercises in countries where there is no word for social inclusion, let alone meaningful understanding of it, and where there has been no serious government poverty strategy, with all the associated properties of deliberation, consensus, implementation, accountability and so forth attached (Lendvai 2004, 330).

Accordingly, the 2004 amendment of the Social Act or the 2005 Reform of the Family Support System can be explicitly linked to EU legislation and/or OMC processes. The framework for most of these amendments is called the “SZOLID Project”, a governmental program that aimed at a “welfare turn” and the improvement of the Hungarian social assistance and family support system in light of European objectives. As it is stated on the website of the Ministry of Health, “The objective of the SZOLID Project is to lay down the foundation of legal norms and institutions of a social welfare system after the closing of the 15 years of transition period following the change of the political system and after the EU accession.”⁷

Furthermore, partly linked to OMC processes, another important incentive for adopting policies based on European guidelines or objectives in the post-accession period is the availability of EU funding, especially through the European Social Fund or the EQUAL program. It has been argued that the European Social Fund can be of particular importance for reconciliation policies in the EU (O'Connor 2008). In Hungary, since 2004, there has been a recurring reference in parliamentary debates to the European Union as a source of funds – and thus as an important factor in initiating and adopting certain legislative changes (for example, in connection with the START program, which involves the preferential treatment of people belonging to certain disadvantaged groups and which makes explicit reference to the Lisbon Strategy).

Most legislative acts related to the issue of reconciliation have been adopted in this period. The most important acts that are related to this issue are the 2004 amendment of several laws concerning social provisions, the 2005 Reform of the

Family Support System, and the three acts establishing and amending the START Program. MPs in related parliamentary debates frequently referred to EU-related principles – thus used EU jargon – as well as referred to soft OMC processes and to the availability of EU funds. When the goal of reconciliation was explicitly mentioned, it was usually done so with reference to the European Union.

The series of amendments in 2004 included the re-regulation of social assistance given to those returning to the labor market after taking care of children or disabled relatives. As the minister for youth, family, social affairs and equal opportunities argued, previous legislation provided inadequate social security for these people in case they lost their jobs while away from the labor market or if they could not find jobs after taking care of their children or relatives. The new regulation made it possible for people returning the labor market but remaining unemployed to receive social assistance after three months instead of one year. This amendment said to provide new incentives for and help in returning the labor market. The amendment also concerned the sum of the nursing allowance provided to those nursing disabled relatives.

The reconciliation of work and family life was one of the explicit goals of this amendment: a goal that contributes to the increasing employment of women. In addition to the new regulations, the amendment aimed at developing day-care services as well, including nurseries for children and day-care institutions for disabled people. As the minister argued: “in order to advance in the area of female employment, there is a need for the reconciliation of work and family life, so there is a need for day-care services that can safely take care of those in need of nursing so that women can return to the labor market”⁸ (Göncz, 23.11.2004, authors’ translation). According to the minister, such day-care institutions can be developed with the help of funding received from the European Union. Similarly, in the 2005 debate of the Reform of the Family Support System, the minister argued that “The requirement of the European Union is to provide such [day-care] services to 30% of children between 0 and 3 years of age”⁹ (Göncz, 20.09.2005, authors’ translation), which is an explicit reference to the Lisbon Strategy.

The START Program also aimed at enhancing the employment of disadvantaged groups – women with small children among them. As the speaker of the governing Socialist Party argued, it is mainly women who have to take care of children and therefore face problems when returning to the labor market. Based on the START Program, abatements are given on contributions of employers employing disadvantaged people (partly funded by the European Social Fund), providing incentives for employers to employ people belonging to specific groups this way. Interestingly, during the third debate of the START program (the debate of its second amendment in 2006), an opposition speaker criticized the proposal for not enhancing the reconciliation of work and family life. According to her argument, while the government concentrates on enhancing employment, it does not pay enough attention on developing childcare institutions. Thus, helping the employment of women is only one side of the coin; without childcare institutions (or proper access to childcare institutions), they cannot make use of these opportunities (Bernáth, 11.12.2006).

Soft processes were referred to in the debate of the 2004 amendment of several laws concerning social provisions and the START program. For example, as the minister for youth, family, social affairs and equal opportunities argued in the 2004 parliamentary debate, the proposal “also answers the requirement of the European Union – articulated by the European Union as a whole – according to which all Member States have to develop plans tackling social exclusion and poverty”¹⁰ (Göncz, 23.11.2004, authors’ translation). The European Employment Strategy was mentioned in the 2005 debate of the START Program.

Throughout the parliamentary debates, EU-related principles were used both by the government and by the opposition. In both cases the mentioning of these principles served as an argument in favor of a given statement. This was especially the case of the 2004 debate of the amendment of several laws concerning social provisions. In this debate, such principles mentioned by the minister for youth, family, social affairs and equal opportunities were, for example, legal certainty (“Legal certainty is a very important expectation and requirement in all countries of the European Union”¹¹; Göncz, 23.11.2004, authors’ translation), subsidiarity, or partnership (“As it is established by the core principles of the European Union, such issues cannot be solved solely on a central governmental level. We can only advance in this area if there is partnership between the main actors”¹²; Göncz, 23.11.2004, authors’ translation). When criticizing the proposal, opposition speakers emphasized the principles of transparency, subsidiarity, or social security. Furthermore, one MP from the opposition claimed that the proposed amendment would “seriously endanger tackling poverty, which is a central concern of the government and also an EU requirement”¹³ (Mátrai, 23.11.2004, authors’ translation).

The framing of the European Union as a source of funds was especially articulated in the 2006 debate of the START Program. While the EU or the EU average was often mentioned as a benchmark for the quality of life, EU-related arguments mostly concerned the availability of funding from the European Social Fund.

Conclusion

Family life and work need to be reconciled for both men and women. However, in almost every country, women disproportionately take the responsibility of the former. Most member states of the European Union develop policies to cope with this situation and boost female labor force participation. Certainly, reconciliation of work and domestic lives mean more than instruments targeting women but main debates revolve around this issue. In this paper, we analyzed reconciliation debates in Hungary from Europeanization perspective. Hungary, with its low female labor force participation rates and its initial divergence from the Union’s overall reconciliation policies, provide a good case for studying the impact of Europe on policy making in gender equality and family related matters.

Europeanization can be understood in multiple ways. This paper examined the various usages of Europe in domestic policy discourses in Hungary. The paper analyzed how domestic political actors both in government and in opposition utilize

the concepts and categories developed by the Union, and how they refer to them. Usages of Europe in policy discourses can indicate a rising influence of Europe into domestic policy-making since negative as well as positive references mean that standards and concepts by the European Union are viewed as tangible and possibly taken as alternatives or substitutes to established national policies.

In the Hungarian context, the paper distinguished three periods of Europeanization. In the first period – in which the first comprehensive Family Support Act was adopted – basically no reference was made to the European Union. Accordingly, this Act – its goal being to protect the institution of the family to ensure demographic growth – did not prioritize reconciliation and women's employment at all and was criticized of not being in line with European principles. The second period before 2004 was the period of legal harmonization. Therefore, reconciliation-related acts (e.g. on telework) were mainly adopted as an answer to European expectations and conditionality criteria. Finally, in the third period after the 2004 accession, the reconciliation of work and family life became an explicit goal of the government, usually with references made to European processes and European principles. In this period, MPs started using the jargon of the EU. Furthermore, the availability of European funding was an important trigger of reconciliation-related reform

¹ Magyarországnak, a magyar nemzetnek és a magyar társadalomnak egészséges jövőre van szüksége ahhoz, hogy erős és harmonikus társadalomként és ne kiszolgáltatottan csatlakozzék az Európai Unió intézményrendszeréhez. Mindennek pedig megkerülhetetlen feltétele, alfa és ómega az egészséges család, illetve az egészséges családban felnövő, testben, lélekben és szellemben egészséges gyermek, aki egyben az egész társadalom értéke és kincse is. Sokszor halljuk azt az igazságot, hogy az Európai Unió intézményeihez nem kormányok fognak csatlakozni, hanem a társadalmak. (...) ennek a gondolatnak az analógiájaként (...) végső soron az Európai Unió intézményrendszeréhez a magyar családok fognak csatlakozni

² A törvényjavaslat megvalósulása hozzájárulhat ahhoz, hogy az erős és életképes magyarság egyenrangú partnerként találja meg a maga helyét az európai nemzetek közösségében.

³ On anti-discrimination debates and discourses see Dombos et al. (2007).

⁴ A nők és a férfiak közötti egyenjogúságot, azt gondolom, hallatlan nagy mértékben segíti majd ez az intézkedés.

⁵ A távmunkára vonatkozó uniós megállapodás átvételével kapcsolatban megjegyzendő, hogy ez nem norma, de az Európai Unió fontosnak tartja az irányelvekben nem kihirdetett szabályok tagállami

alkalmazását és átvételét is. E tekintetben európai léptékben is úttörő vállalkozásnak tekintendő a távmunka uniós követelményeinek beépítése a magyar jogba.

⁶ A távmunka (...) megkönnyítheti a nők, különösképpen a családanyák, valamint az otthonukhoz kötött, megváltozott munkaképességű emberek számára a munkaerőpiacon való részvételt.

⁷ <http://www.eum.hu/main.php?folderID=34640&objectID=6002595>

⁸ ahhoz, hogy elsődlegesen a nők munkavállalása területén előre tudjunk lépni, szükség van arra, hogy család és munkahely összeegyeztethetőbb legyen, hogy a nappali ellátások biztosítsák az ellátásra szoruló családtagok számára azt a biztonságos ellátást, ami lehetővé teszi a nők számára a munkavállalást.

⁹ Az európai uniós elvárás az, hogy a 0-3 év közötti korosztály 30 százalékának legyen lehetősége az ellátás igénybevételére.

¹⁰ Ez a törvénymódosítás-csomag (...) megfelel annak az európai uniós elvárásnak is, amelyet megfogalmazott az Európai Unió egésze, hogy a társadalmi kirekesztés ellenében és a szegénység csökkentésére mindegyik országnak terveket kell kidolgoznia.

¹¹ Nagyon fontos elvárás és követelmény minden európai uniós országban a jogbiztonság.

¹² Az európai uniós alapelvek is kimondják, hogy ezek a kérdések nem megoldhatóak kizárólag kormányzati szinten. Csak akkor tudunk előrelépni ezen a területen, ha partnerség lesz a szereplők között.

¹³ súlyosan veszélyeztetik a kormányzat által központi jelentőségűnek tekintett, európai uniós kötelezettségként is vállalt, szegénység és kirekesztés elleni küzdelmet

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