

TRADITIONAL FAMILIALISM SERVED WITH EU GRAVY

Reconciliation Policies in Hungary

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Traditional Familialism Served with EU Gravy: Reconciliation Policies in Hungary

The article examines the role of EU in shaping work-family reconciliation policies in Hungary between the 1990s and 2011. More specifically, it looks at how members of the Hungarian Parliament framed European requirements and/or standards, and how they used references to European processes in their arguments. The article distinguishes three periods of Europeanization. In the first period, references made to the European Union were sporadic. The second period before 2004 was the period of legal harmonisation. Finally, in the third period after the 2004 accession, principles and processes of the European Union became important reference points in parliamentary debates. European jargon – including the reconciliation of work and family life – entered the vocabulary of members of the parliament, who have been using it as an important resource. Furthermore, the availability of European funding has been an important trigger of reforms. However, within this period, the principle of reconciliation was used very differently depending on the parties in government, drawing attention to strategic usages of European norms to serve party politics.

Les politiques de réconciliation travail/famille en Hongrie: un familialisme traditionnel à la sauce européenne

Cet article analyse l'influence de l'UE sur l'évolution des politiques de réconciliation entre travail et famille en Hongrie du début des années 1990 à 2011. Plus précisément, il s'intéresse à la façon dont les parlementaires Hongrois ont repris les exigences et /ou les normes européennes, ainsi qu'à la façon dont ils ont utilisé les références aux processus européens dans leurs argumentaires. Cet article distingue trois périodes d'européanisation. Au cours de la première période, les références à l'Union européenne n'étaient que sporadiques. La deuxième période, jusqu'à 2004, est celle de l'harmonisation législative. Enfin, après l'élargissement de 2004, les principes et les processus européens deviennent des points de référence centraux dans les débats parlementaires: le jargon européen (y compris la réconciliation du travail et de la vie familiale) pénètre le vocabulaire des parlementaires qui s'en servent comme d'une ressource importante. Les financements européennes ont également constitué un déclencheur de réforme non négligeable. Cependant, tout au long de cette période, le principe de réconciliation a été utilisé de façon très différente en fonction des partis alors au pouvoir, soulignant ainsi le rôle des usages stratégiques des normes européennes réalisés par les partis politiques.

Traditional Familialism Served with EU Gravy

Reconciliation Policies in Hungary

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Reconciliation policies, or in other words policies aiming to provide a balance between work and private lives, are shaped by a large variety of factors including demographic pressures, labour market needs, and culturally embedded gender roles. Thus, it is understandable that the extent and depth of such policies differ significantly across countries. Depending on the dominant social values and policy requirements, reconciliation via flexible work or time arrangements, provision of services by the public and private sector, and a more equal distribution of paid and unpaid work can be offered (Hantrais, 2000). All of these solutions aim to maintain the work-life balance with different emphases on different aspects of the problem. Due to the relative absence of legal requirements at the EU level and differing degrees of involvement of domestic actors, national strategies are not fully harmonised, and we see a variety of approaches in the domestic sphere.

Compared to the other transition countries, Hungary stands out by its comprehensive system of family policies, which is enduring and has changed relatively little over time. The Hungarian system is generally classified as an optional but gendered familialism indicating that women are mostly responsible for the household but the families still can resort to different forms of support from the state (Leitner, 2003). Additionally, since the 1960s, mother identity in Hungary has been emphasised over worker identity, and the main social actors as well as the majority of the beneficiaries have supported this view (Fodor, 2003). Although Hungarian family policies were not targeting a balance between work and family life, the domestic support kept

1 The content of this article does not reflect the official opinion of the European Commission or the EACEA. Responsibility for the information and views expressed in the article lies entirely with the authors.

it largely intact. At the time when transformations took place, key national actors also adopted the EU discourse on reconciliation policy. However, the link between such policy discourses and the different kinds of changes in Hungarian family policies is not clear-cut. For this reason, we need to open the “black box” of domestic policy-making in order to gain a better insight into discursive and policy changes as well as the role of the EU.

The aim of this article is to examine how the observed changes in Hungarian family policies came about. In order to do so, the article looks at domestic “usages of Europe” concerning the reconciliation of work and family life between the 1990s and 2011 in a well-defined political arena, the Hungarian Parliament. Given the weakness of social partners and civil society organisations for affecting legislation, and the support by the main social actors and the beneficiaries for traditional familialism, we argue that the Parliament is the most important political arena to examine policy changes. The “usages of Europe” framework assumes that political actors regard and “seize the European Union as a set of opportunities” at the national level (Jacquot and Woll, 2003, see also Graziano *et al.*, 2011), depending on how it serves their needs. This means that 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. When domestic actors “use” Europe, they can use European concepts, statistics, regulations and financial means as strategic resources in political debates.

Since the Hungarian system of family policies is marked by stability, one could expect EU accession to have minor impacts. However, this process brought about gradual but visible policy changes towards a European framework. Already in 2003, there was a move away from the previously established demography-based arguments and several EU documents discussing gender equality and best practices for childcare were referred to. Indeed, until 2010, female employment remained to be the focus of the family policies, and we argue that the pro-EU attitude of the major political actors has been determining in this process. After 2010 however, there was a swing back to demography-based arguments, and the domestic responsibilities of women were once again heavily emphasized with a less pro-EU government in power. However, reconciliation has not disappeared from policy debates, and unlike in the early 1990s, a relatively strong focus on reconciliation served to legitimate policies supporting the gendered division of labour. Thus, we claim that the EU’s influence continued to be important at the discursive level even when the government has not been pro-EU but the actual policies have been immediately reverted to be in line with traditional familialism.

The rest of the article is organised as follows. In the next section, the development of family policies in Hungary over the 1990-2011 period is presented. In the third section, the usages of Europe for reconciliation reforms are analysed by distinguishing specific time periods based on the analysis of parliamentary debates. The final section presents concluding remarks.

Evolution of Family Policies and Domestic Discourses

As mentioned above, a comprehensive system of family policies has been present in Hungary since the 1960s, and over time the system grew to be one of the largest public expenditure items. Although there have been some alterations on eligibility and coverage, family policies continue to have three pillars in Hungary. The first pillar is the universal family allowance which includes the childcare support as well. An employment- and wage-related benefit (GYED) forms the second pillar, and the third pillar is the flat-rate childcare allowance (GYES). Either parents or grandparents can receive these two types of benefits, and in 2003 paid paternal leave also became possible in Hungary². Table 1 summarises family policies in Hungary as of the end of the analysed period, 2011.

Table 1. Family Policies in Hungary, 2011

Maternity leave	24 weeks for insured employees
Entitlement	Universal
Level of benefits	100 % of the insured wage/salary
Child care leave (age of the child)	3 years GYES, 2 year GYED
Entitlement	Universal (GYES), Employee (GYED)
Work option	30 hours of employment after the 1 st birthday of the child
Level of benefits	Minimum pension, (GYES), 70% of previous wage (GYED)
Birth grants	225 % min. pension (64,125 HUF)
Tax deductions	62,500 HUF/child/month for 1 or 2 children; 206,250 HUF in case of 3+ children
Rate of children enrolled in crèches (0-2 ages)	11.9 %
Rate of children enrolled in kindergarten (3-6 ages)	88.1 %

Source: Inglot *et al.* (2011)

2 Despite the very short duration – 5 days – of this leave it has been argued that it has a significant symbolic meaning in the Hungarian context for sharing care work (Kispeter, 2009).

Family policies are gendered in Hungary and demographic issues are given utmost priority, which is partly due to the secular decline in fertility rates starting well before the transition³. The policies have been characterised by long leave options from the labour market for females, and limited childcare provision outside the home. Accordingly, reconciliation discourses in Hungary have been relatively marginal and have been mostly concerned with the difficulties women face when re-entering the labour market after long maternity leaves (Meier *et al.*, 2007, 110). Apart from a short period of moving away from traditional familism in the early 2000s, partly due to cognitive and strategic usage of European resources, the function of family policies has been generally seen as helping to solve demography related issues rather than helping women entering into the labour force. In Hungary, the activity rate of women is estimated to be rather low (around 57 %), and in 2011 it was recorded to be around 80 % of men's (Eurostat, 2013). Family policies and childcare facilities significantly affect women's decisions on labour market participation. Despite the lack of longitudinal data on the employment record of women with children, indirect indicators point towards a high rate of inactivity among Hungarian women with children⁴ (UNECE, 2012).

Given the relative weakness of trade unions and women's organisations in Hungary, political elites are the most significant actors in reconciliation reforms. Besides, as was mentioned above, traditional familism has been largely supported by several of the main social and civil actors – including women's organisations – as well as by the beneficiaries of the system. When it comes to external pressures, 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 economic but also social policies. The EU at that stage agreed with these arrangements, and did not push for the more active involvement of government (Ferge, 2002). Nevertheless, these international organisations were not particularly concerned about reconciliation policies.

From the mid-1990s onwards, with the accession process, the EU became more influential, also in the field of gender equality. Starting with the pre-accession period, there were some modifications in family policies. For example, day-care services were largely ignored in Hungary until 2003, and

3 Hungary differs from the other transition countries in this respect where the fertility rates began to decline much earlier, around mid-1970s.

4 Family care in general is expected from women who withdrew from the labour market either through early retirement or in the case of child rearing using the parental leave.

only after this date, the significance of care institutions outside the home was realised. These revisions could be attributed to EU harmonisation. Around the year of EU accession (2004), the EU played an even more important role in making Hungarian governments recognise that female labour market participation is highly contingent on the type of family policy applied. Table 2 presents the main steps of reforms undertaken in the area of family and related policy fields (employment policy and social policy) and the policy orientation and goals of these changes.

Table 2. Main Steps in Reforming Family Policy

Legislation	Year/ No.	Policy orientation and goals	Date of analysed debates
Act on job assistance and unemployment benefits (referred to as employment act)	1991/IV	Institutionalisation of unemployment insurance, the basis of a social assistance system	21 January 1991
Social Act	1993/III	Institutionalisation of social assistance; introduction of "full-time motherhood"	28 October 1992
Amendment of several laws (austerity package)	1995	Economic restructuring and stabilisation	N. A.
Child Protection Act	1997/XXXI	System of child protection benefits	4 February 1997 11 February 1997 24 February 1997
Family Support Act	1998/ LXXXIV	Institutionalisation of a comprehensive family support system (gendered familialism)	24 november 1998
Amendment of the Employment Act and the Social Act	1999/CXXII	Reform of the unemployment insurance and benefit system	30 November 1999
Amendment of the Family Support Act	2001/XII	Grandparents can receive child care allowance	14 February 2001 9 March 2001
Amendment of laws (Labour Code, Employment Act and Social Act)	2001/XVI 2001/ XXIV 2001/ LXXIX	Legal harmonisation	13 December 2000 15 February 2001 26 March 2001 6 September 2001
Amendment of several laws concerning employment and social provisions	2002/LIII	Facilitating part-time work, giving fathers extra leave	12 November 2002 3 December 2002
Amendment of the Labour Code	2003/XX	Legal harmonisation	18 February 2003 25 February 2003
Amendment of the Labour Code and several other acts	2004/ XXVIII	Legal framework for telework	30 March 2004 5 April 2004

Legislation	Year/ No.	Policy orientation and goals	Date of analysed debates
Amendment of several laws concerning social provisions	2004/ CXXXVI	Re-regulation of social assistance (female employment and reconciliation)	23 November 2004 6 December 2004
Amendment of the Family Support Act	2005/ CXXXVI	Reform of the family support system (parents can work full time while receiving parental leave benefits; female employment and reconciliation)	20 September 2005 26 September 2005 10 October 2005 24 October 2005 7 November 2005
Acts establishing and amending the START Programme	2004/ CXXXIII 2005/ LXXIII 2007/XIV	Promoting the employment of disadvantaged groups (female employment and reconciliation)	22 November 2004 29 November 2004 6 December 2004 8 June 2005 20 June 2005 11 December 2006 13 February 2007 5 March 2007
Amendment of several laws concerning the organisation of working time	2007/ LXXIII	Legal harmonisation	22 May 2007 4 June 2007
Amendment of the Family Support Act	2008/LIX	Modification of certain provisions concerning full-time motherhood	3 June 2008
Amendment of several laws concerning employment and social provisions	2008/CVII	Re-regulation of social and unemployment assistance (active labour market policies)	19 November 2008 25 November 2008 1 ^{er} December 2008 15 December 2008
Amendment of the Family Support Act	2009/ LXXIX	Reform of the family support system (reducing parental leave support, female employment)	21 April 2009 28 April 2009 11 May 2009 25 May 2009
Amendment of several laws concerning employment	2009/ CXXXVI	Part-time work in the public sector for parents returning to work	13 October 2009 19 October 2009 2 November 2009
Amendment of several laws	2010/ CLXXI	Reform of the family support system (extending parental leave support; gendered familialism and reconciliation)	7 December 2010 14 December 2010
Family Protection Act	2011/CCXI	Cardinal law on family values (gendered familialism and reconciliation)	9 December 2011 14 December 2011
Labour Code	2012/1	Adoption of new labour code; reconciliation and part-time work	9 November 2011 28 November 2011 13 December 2011

Source: Authors' compilation from parliamentary documents.

Hungary has a multi-party system, usually with several parties forming coalition governments. Since 1990, coalitions have shifted several times between the political “right” and the “left”, though parties in the coalitions were not always the same. Thus, policy decisions are not expected to be continuous and coherent. Family policy has been playing a symbolic role throughout this period, signalling the values the governments aimed to promote. As a consequence, family policies kept changing with every new government. However, there has been a visible discursive shift towards concepts and principles used by documents of the European Union, regardless the direction family policies have been taking.

The first government after the transition, a conservative coalition (1990-1994), explicitly affirmed the household role of women and strongly encouraged a male breadwinner model⁵. Additionally, they constrained the options of having paid work and domestic responsibilities by not funding most day-care institutions. Hence, the initial policy making in Hungary regarding family policies continued the pre-transition understanding of a gendered division of labour. Under the next, socialist-liberal coalition government (1994-1998), an austerity package was introduced due to economic troubles in 1995. The aim was basically curbing the public expenditures without necessarily indicating a shift towards more gender equality or the enhancement of female work. The opposition in the parliament mainly revolved around the issue of whether the targeted and restrained benefits should be used for social inclusion or for boosting birth rates (Kispeter, 2009).

With another governmental change in 1998, the new right-wing government (1998-2002) adopted a new family policy framework, partly to counter-act the previous austerity package. An important aim of the new family policy framework was to stop the demographic decline of the country, and it focused on the domestic responsibilities of women. With its emphasis on universal and partly tax-based benefits, the newly designed system was mainly targeting the middle class (Ferge, 2001 ; Gyarmati, 2010). For this reason, it was widely criticised by the opposition and the policy community. As some 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).

With EU accession debates heating in the early 2000s, the newly elected Hungarian socialist-liberal coalition (2002-2004, followed by a new government with the same coalition between 2004 and 2006) regarded family policy as

5 For details of male bread winner model see Crompton (1999).

an instrument to help those in need (Gyarmati, 2010). Furthermore, especially from 2004 onwards, they openly proposed family policy as a means to increase female labour force participation and female employment. Women were no longer viewed as the ultimate bearers of household labour, but instead were pictured as equals to their male counterparts for paid (though rarely for unpaid) responsibilities.

These reforms differed from earlier ones in the sense that they were linked explicitly or implicitly to EU requirements in political debates or followed European objectives⁶. The reconciliation of work and family life became a part of discussions on family policies, with the emphasis on promoting female employment. This focus stayed relative stable under successive governments between 2006 and 2010 (socialist-liberal coalition until 2008, followed by two socialist governments until 2010, the latter labelled as “technocratic” with the goal of responding to the economic crisis), though in a substantially weakened form, partly due to a refocusing of priorities on child poverty (Gyarmati, 2010).

2010 saw the return of a right-wing-conservative government coalition, with a new shift towards family policies focusing on demography and the domestic responsibilities of women. However, while policies partly go back to the gendered familialism of 1998, this shift is framed as a means to promote the reconciliation of work and family life – an idea completely absent at the end of the nineties (see also Inglot *et al.*, 2011). This signals a relatively strong discursive influence of the EU even under a not completely pro-European government.

Usages of Europe: reconciliation reforms in Hungary

Against this background, this section presents the main usages of Europe in Hungarian political debates in relation to reconciliation policies. The analysis is based on the minutes of parliamentary debates of legislative acts concerning the theme of reconciliation of work and family life between 1990 and 2011. Since the following analysis concentrates on political debates in the Hungarian Parliament, it only looks at how the main political actors

6 For example many of the projects are aimed “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” (Ministry of Health, 2006).

– elected representatives and members of the government – use Europe to provide legitimisation for their arguments (“legitimizing usage”). This means that the section examines domestic political discourses on the role of the EU and reconciliation policies. These political discourses are mapped through a qualitative textual analysis, aiming to answer two main questions.

First, this section examines what kinds of references are made to the EU and in which context. In other words, the question we pose is how politicians frame the need to adapt national legislation to a European framework. This aims to show the domestic usages of Europe as a resource in political debates. Second, the analysis aims to show whether and how members of parliament (MPs) and government representatives use the argument of reconciliation; and if they do not do so, what the main lines of reasoning are instead. The particular interpretations and representations of reconciliation and other “policy frames” serve “to construct the problem of a specific policy situation” (Rein and Schön, 1994, 33). This problem-construction through political discourses is essential in understanding the legal and/or policy outcomes of a political process. Our main interest lies in the usages themselves in particular contexts rather than whether politicians internalise the concepts they use. Finally, our additional goal is to link the changing framing of European requirements and/or standards with the emergence of reconciliation-related arguments. With such an analysis, we open the “black box” of domestic policy-making and study how the EU accession process was able to influence the relatively stable but not reconciliation-friendly family policies in Hungary.

For the textual analysis, we chose debates that are relevant for the theme of reconciliation. This means that we looked at debates of legislative acts concerning the family support system, parental leave options, care-related social assistance and the regulation of work arrangements (part-time work, telework, measures facilitating labour-market re-integration etc.), between 1990 and 2011. Furthermore, we also examined debates that are explicitly related to the adoption of relevant EU legislation.

Based on the analysis of the dominant usages of Europe in parliamentary debates, we can make a distinction between three main periods, which are also connected to the different stages of Hungary’s accession to the EU. In the first period between the early 1990s till 2000s, references made to the EU were sporadic. The second period before 2004 was the period of legal harmonisation. Finally, in the third period after the 2004 accession, principles and processes of the European Union became important reference points in parliamentary debates. European jargon entered the vocabulary of members of

the parliament, who have been using it as an important resource. Furthermore, the availability of European funding has been an important trigger of reforms.

Regarding the principle of reconciliation, it was absent from debates in the first period, and mentioned sporadically in the second. In the third period, nevertheless, the reconciliation of work and family life became an explicit goal of governments, though in very different ways. Between 2004 and 2010, reconciliation was primarily referred to in the context of promoting female employment. In this period, the principle of reconciliation was usually mentioned with explicit references made to European processes, European principles and European funds. However, after 2010 the principle of reconciliation got detached from the direct EU reference. It remained an important frame in family policy debates, but with an emphasis on demographic growth and women's domestic responsibilities instead of female employment.

“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 – in the first period of the transition – while EU accession was always an important event to look forward to, legal harmonisation and thus the direct influence of EU legislation was not too strong. Instead, the dominant EU-related discourse – that was labelled as “cognitive” Europeanization by 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 legitimating function of Europe was served by references to European standards. Interestingly however, 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 opposition parties. Opposition speakers often argued that they do not support certain proposals because these proposals were against the norms of the EU.

The Family Support Act was adopted in 1998. According to Ferge and Juhász (2004, 243), this Act established a system which 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”. Based on the parliamentary debates, it can be also seen that the Family Support Act from 1998 did not explicitly deal

with reconciliation. During the whole debate, 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. Accordingly, references to the EU were made in the context of the well-being of families in a future EU. 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 pre-conditions 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, 1998, authors’ translation).

Following this logic, it was argued that “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” (Szászfalvi, 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 a governing party politician 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 labour 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 were also discussed in this context. Throughout this 2001 parliamentary debate, no reference was made to the EU.

Using Legal Harmonisation as an Argument: Pre-Accession Debates

The second period in the early 2000s can be characterised by extensive legal harmonisation and the transposition of EU directives. In these years, references to EU requirements – and to a lesser extent to EU standards – were among the main arguments in favour of certain proposals. In this process, important steps were, for example, the amendments of the Labour Code for the transposition of Directives 97/81/EC on part-time work and 96/34/EC on parental leave as well as the 2002 framework agreement on telework. In addition, this period is marked by the adoption of a comprehensive anti-discrimination act and of new legal provisions on atypical forms of employment. In this period, the reference to Europe was more mechanic and can be best understood as a response to conditionality pressures. Thus, the EU served as a resource in terms of legal regulations.

Regarding the issue of part-time work, first the 2001 amendment of the Labour Code – that already had the aim of legal harmonisation – was criticised by an MP from the government coalition for not addressing the issue of part-time work deeply enough. However, in his argument, instead of referring to the explicit requirement of the EU, he emphasised the increasing domestic need for part-time employment as well as the comparatively low proportion of women employed part-time in Hungary in comparison to other European countries (Herényi, 2000). He regarded part-time employment as a means to increase female employment in general.

Important legislation related to part-time work includes the 2002 amendment of several laws concerning employment and social provisions and the 2003 modifications of the Labour Code, through which Directive 97/81/EC on part-time work was finally transposed. These amendments took place after the government changed in 2002 and a socialist-liberal coalition followed the conservative one. Besides facilitating part-time work, the 2002 amendment also included a new regulation giving 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” (Béki, 2002, authors’ translation).

During debates on the 2003 modifications of the Labour Code, one of the main arguments legitimating the proposed new regulations was the recurring reference to legal harmonisation and the transposition of EU directives. Regarding part-time work, many MPs emphasised the importance of this employment form in Hungary, arguing that it helps the reconciliation of

work and family life. Similarly, modifications of the Labour 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 endeavour even in European standards.”(Csizmár, 2004, authors’ translation).

The state secretary also stated that this new legal framework on telework “can facilitate the labour market participation of women, especially mothers, and of people with altered working ability that cannot leave their homes” (Csizmár, 2004, authors’ translation).

Using European Jargon and European Funds: Post-Accession Debates

Finally, in the third period, Hungary was already a member of the EU and started to participate in informal coordination processes such as the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). The membership had significant consequences on policy practices, for example through establishing new procedures for developing medium-term strategic plans. This practice of planning and coordination was relatively new and 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 had an 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).

From the beginning of this period, the 2004 amendment of several laws concerning social provisions or the 2005 reform of the family support system can be explicitly linked to EU legislation and/or OMC processes. The framework for these reforms was called the “SZOLID Project”, a governmental programme 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 was stated on the website of the Ministry of Health (2006), “[t]he 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.”

Furthermore, partly linked to OMC processes, another “adaptive pressure” (Goetz, 2001) based on European guidelines or objectives in the post-accession period has been the availability of EU funding, especially through the European Social Fund or the EQUAL programme. In Hungary, since 2004, there has been a recurring reference in parliamentary debates to the EU as a source of funds. In other words, the EU has been framed as an important factor in initiating and adopting certain legislative changes through its funding schemes (for example, in connection with the START programme⁷, which involved the preferential treatment of people belonging to certain disadvantaged groups).

Throughout the parliamentary debates, EU-related principles were used by both the government and the opposition. In both cases, mentioning of these principles served as an argument in favour of a given statement. The 2004 debate of the amendment of several laws concerning social provisions is a good example from the beginning of this period. In this debate, such principles mentioned by the minister for youth, family, social affairs and equal opportunities were, for example, legal certainty⁸, subsidiarity, or partnership⁹. When criticising the proposal, opposition speakers emphasised the principles of transparency, subsidiarity, or social security. A more recent

7 Based on the START Programme, 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.

8 “Legal certainty is a very important expectation and requirement in all countries of the European Union.” (Göncz, 2004, authors’ translation).

9 “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.” (Göncz, 2004, authors’ translation).

example is the parliamentary debate of the new Labour Code adopted in early 2012, where the concept of flexicurity was mentioned frequently both by the government and the opposition.

However, this period is not consistent as far as the usages of the principle of reconciliation are concerned. The year 2010 with the change of government marks a clear dividing line. For this reason, reconciliation debates are discussed in two separate subsections.

- Reconciliation to promote female employment

The period after 2004 marked the “infiltration” of the principle of reconciliation into Hungarian parliamentary jargon. Many legislative acts related to the issue of reconciliation were adopted at the beginning of 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 Programme. 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 EU.

Before 2010, the reconciliation of work and family life was framed as a goal that contributes to the increasing employment of women. In addition to the new regulations on social assistance, the concept is connected to the aim of developing day-care services, including nurseries for children and day-care institutions for disabled people. As the Minister for Youth, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities argued in 2004: “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 labour market” (Göncz, 2004, authors’ translation). According to the Minister, such day-care institutions can be developed with the help of funding received from the EU.

The promotion of female employment was at the heart of discourses on changes of the family support system, most importantly in 2005 and 2009. The 2005 amendment of the Family Support Act made it possible for parents to work full-time after the first birthday of the child, while still receiving childcare allowance for three years (GYES). The 2009 amendment reduced the time the childcare allowance could be received to two years, “in order to

provide incentives for parents to go back to work” (Korózs, 2009, authors’ translation).

- Reconciliation to promote demographic growth

After the elections in 2010, a conservative and more Euro-sceptic government took office, which changed the direction of family policies almost immediately. The time during which the childcare allowance can be received was changed back to three years, with a restriction of 30 hours of weekly work allowed in parallel. In addition, the government started explicitly promoting the part-time work of women by obliging all employers to employ part-time those returning from parental leave upon request before the third birthday of the child. These changes were meant to promote demographic growth, the “future of the nation” (Ágh, 2010, authors’ translation) and the protection of the family.

The domestic responsibilities of women re-entered the political discourse. For example, as an MP from the governing coalition argued,

“extending the time of eligibility for receiving the childcare allowance to three years makes it possible for children to stay at home with their mothers or fathers. (...) probably this is also the best for them; moreover, this is also the most cost-effective solution, since creating one day-care place equals the childcare allowance received by five mothers.” (Kővári, 2010, authors’ translation).

In addition, with such policies, “women can live for their ambition, since no more knowledge is required in any other profession than in raising children or in keeping a family together” (Kővári 2010, authors’ translation).

At the same time, the reconciliation of work and family life remained at the heart of policy discourses. Reconciliation is mentioned as one of the key principles driving policy-makers in creating the new Labour Code (2012) as well as in connection with the Family Protection Act (2011). However, while women’s employment is not completely absent from debates (most typically on part-time work), the principle of reconciliation is primarily linked to demographic growth. When introducing the new Labour Code, the state secretary for the Ministry for National Economy argued that “this proposal pays particular attention to the reconciliation of work and family life, and as part of this approach, to urge families to have children and to protect them” (Czomba, 2011, authors’ translation). Even women’s employment is referred to as “a big question of demographic policy” (Soltész, 2010, authors’

translation). Interestingly, while arguing for different policies, the opposition also embraced this primacy of demographic growth, emphasising for example that “fertility rates are higher in countries with high female employment” (Ertsey, 2010, authors’ translation).

As opposed to pre-2010 debates, reconciliation is not mentioned explicitly as an EU-related principle. While references made to the European Union and European jargon are important in policy discussions, not necessarily in relation to reconciliation. European comparisons are frequently made in relation to part-time work and women’s participation, but the principle of reconciliation got detached from its European origin.

Conclusion

In the Hungarian context, the article distinguished three distinct periods of “using” Europe. In the first period, while the government rarely mentioned the EU, references were made to European standards by the opposition. Policies adopted in this period aimed at protecting the institution of the family to ensure demographic growth and thus did not prioritise reconciliation and female employment. The second period before 2004 was the period of legal harmonisation. Therefore, the main legitimisation strategy of all governments was an emphasis on European requirements. Reconciliation-related acts (e.g. on part-time work and telework) were mainly adopted as an answer to European expectations and conditionality criteria. Finally, in the third period after the 2004 accession, Europe was mentioned in terms of three important resources: cognitive (using European jargon), standard-setting and financial. This means that MPs started using the jargon of the EU, and the availability of European funding was an important trigger of reforms. In this period, the reconciliation of work and family life became an explicit goal of governments.

Nonetheless, reconciliation has been used very differently by different political actors. Between 2004 and 2010, under socialist (partly in coalition with liberals) governments, reconciliation was linked to female employment, usually with references made to European processes and European principles. This marked a clear distance from previous demography-dominated debates. After 2010, however, the conservative government turned back to the gendered familialism of the early nineties, emphasising women’s domestic responsibilities and demographic growth. In this period, reconciliation

has been used as a discursive tool to support policies oriented towards demographic problems.

In sum, while usages of Europe in policy discourses in Hungary indicate a rising influence of Europe into domestic policy-making, Hungarian family policies have been relatively enduring and have not been very supportive of reconciling work and family life. Moreover, contexts in which the concept of reconciliation has been used also demonstrate the primacy of party politics. While this principle has been used by all political actors, left or right, it has served to legitimate very different reforms: ones that go in line with European standards (i.e. trying to increase the role of formal institutions in care-taking), and ones that do less so (emphasising the domestic responsibilities of women). This highlights that the EU can serve as a strategic discursive resource for reforms of very different nature.

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