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Trojan Horses and the Implications of Strategic Framing: Reflections on Gender Equality Policies, Intimate Citizenship and Demographic Change¹

Introduction

The current presence of demographic arguments in European societies is starting to link several debates that have been more separate before. The lack of children in European societies is problematised in view of the economy or because of the financing of the welfare state, generating debates, initiatives and research on the causes of the decline in child births, changing compositions and roles of families, the consequences for society and the best strategies for the future. As women are given attention (be it sometimes implicitly) as the obvious ‘producers’ of children in the emerging debates, it is time to take a closer look at what happens in policy making in Europe, and how gender equality is seen to be related to fertility, demographic decline or growth. This chapter will first briefly recapitulate how feminism has framed fertility in the first and second wave, and then present research on European family policies as these policies are one of the obvious locations of interventions and understandings of gender, family and fertility. Earlier comparative research and recent data on gender equality policies in all countries of the European Union will be used to show how the goals of demographic balance and gender equality are often interwoven, implicitly or strategically, and some reflections on the implications of this for gender equality will end in more questions than answers.

Earlier feminist positions on fertility

Reproductive rights were at the heart of the second wave of the women’s movement in Europe, focusing on the right of women to choose whether or not and when to have babies. The demand was especially for the right *not* to have babies, and to have access to safe and affordable anti-conception and

¹ Mieke Verloo is very grateful to Waltraud Ernst and Heike Kahlert for having triggered thinking on the subject of this chapter, and for being wonderful, patient and careful editors.

abortion methods. In this sense, the relationship of the second wave of the women's movement to fertility and motherhood had a predominantly 'negative' accent: it framed fertility and motherhood as one of the capabilities of (most) women that was closely linked to patriarchy, oppression and exploitation and that transferred sexual and gender inequalities in child bearing and rearing to other domains such as education, labour market and political participation.

Not all feminists in the second wave were negative about women's capacity to bear children altogether, but some extremely negative voices were very visible. Shulamith Firestone (1970), who saw biological reproduction as one of the biggest 'causes' of gender inequality, and in whose vision true gender equality could only come about if full artificial reproduction was possible and organised, keeping the power about fertility in the hands of women without burdening them with it, is maybe the best example. This is a discourse of the 'womb as a trap for women'.

At the same time, there were also feminists who saw women's biological capacities to reproduce the species as some proof of their bigger virtue, or simply as a model to take for a different organisation of the world.

At the time of the first wave of feminism, Alexandra Kollontai, an early Russian feminist, talked about the 'double contribution of women to society', meaning that women not only, like men, contribute to the production processes in society, but that they have a unique second contribution, namely to 'produce new citizens' (Kollontai 1923). In Kollontai's view, motherhood is not in itself a sufficient reason for society to support her, but mothers are entitled to extra care and special treatment from society if they also share the work for society – in the official economy – with men. She argues that the mother's function is a highly important but complementary social obligation (*sic*) towards society, because she is producing a healthy and fit-for-life child, breast feeding it and raising it to be a future worker for society. Her argument was meant to show how important women were for societies, defending their value against dominant understandings of women as 'less important' human beings. Even if her position strongly leans towards motherhood as a *duty* for women, I did not find any contestation of this historical feminist position.

Looking at current debates on the greying of societies and on problems related to demographic changes in Europe, Kollontai's argument sounds strangely familiar. In this chapter, I will give some examples of European countries where the demographic argument is used to defend changes in reconciliation policies, in labour market policies or in gender equality policies. Interesting things happen in these argumentations that need to be reflected upon. Especially, I want to consider whether we can say anything at all about the

question if the current attention for demographic ‘problems’ is positive or negative for gender equality. I use ‘gender equality’ in the previous sentence as shorthand for ‘a vision towards the abolishment of gender inequality’. First I will turn to some European Union family policies to see if there are trends visible there.

European Union family policies and gender equality

Recent analyses of European Union family policies by Stratigaki and Duncan have produced interesting insights on the development of issues connecting gender equality and family policy.² They differ in what they consider important accents and shifts in framing. In an impressive overview and analysis, Maria Stratigaki shows how a concept introduced to encourage gender equality in the labour market – what is known mostly under the label of ‘reconciliation of work and family life’ – gradually shifted meaning as it became incorporated in the European Employment Strategy of the 1990s. From an objective with a feminist potential it became purely a market-oriented objective. What her analysis shows is that, first of all, the concept of reconciling work and family has been addressing mainly the gendered division of labour, and not so much the gendered organisation of intimacy. The original goal was ‘sharing’, shifting later to the policy objective of ‘reconciliation of work and family life’. “Sharing is a term associated with equality of women and men, defining a policy objective in the area of gender relations, whereas reconciliation is derived from labour market analysis and has a more economic orientation” (Stratigaki 2004: 2). This main accent on the organisation of labour is a shift that has allowed accommodating a growing policy priority on the creation of employment.

Secondly, this shift towards the organisation of labour has involved a move away from a focus on gender equality towards a focus on reproducing and consolidating women’s roles and responsibilities as primary care givers. In order to facilitate the participation of women on the labour market, new policies often mainly consist of creating possibilities for women to combine care for children and paid labour, while they involve only minor options for stimulating fathers to take care of their children. This focus reproduces the norm that it is women’s responsibility to take care of children, while this is optional for fathers, and thus fails to challenge stereotyped gender relations (Stratigaki 2004: 19).

² The description of Duncan and Stratigaki is taken from Verloo et al. (2005).

Simon Duncan's analysis of the development of EU policy on 'the reconciliation of work and family life' focuses on another policy frame that interferes with gender equality, what he calls the 'demographic time bomb discourse'. In his analysis, the policies of the European Union have never been the outcome of concerns for gender equality only. Rather, the central theme has been demography. The main reason for higher wages for women in France, according to Duncan, ultimately was French natalism, rationalised by the (gendered) equality principles of 1789, and the importance of national gender contracts to competing national political economies (Duncan 2002: 307). Duncan argues that in the 1990s various policy problems such as ageing of the population, low fertility, and the need for a flexible work force could be addressed by reconciliation. The gender (equality) discourse could then fit into and exploit this agenda, given further impetus in the mid 1990s by the accession of Finland and Sweden who had to deliver to their home constituencies (Duncan 2002: 311). Duncan concludes that, even if the dominant theme in the EU is not gender equality but a competitive economy, the debates on the demographic time bomb and on flexible labour have moved gender equality centre stage, if only because gender equality is seen as necessary to achieve success in these fields. Duncan (2002: 310) identifies two sets of policy responses to this perceived 'demographic time bomb'. Firstly, negative and descriptive measures, such as redefining women as child bearers in traditional households; and secondly, positive and supportive policies, such as changing structures so that women and men can both have a life at work and babies. The latter discourse, he claims, became prominent on the EU agenda via 'reconciling employment and family life' at the accession of Sweden and Finland in 1994, actually aiming at a redistribution of work and status between women and men, or changing the gender contract (Duncan 2002: 307).

More generally, there seem to be two opposing assumptions underneath the variety of regimes in family policies: one stating that gender equality is not only good for women, but also for families; and the opposing one presenting a traditional division of labour as good for families while gender equality is not good for them (Kaufman 2002). In the last type of regime, family policy is often a way of facilitating home mother care for children.

Ideologies of motherhood in European rulings about families

Clare McGlynn analysed especially the ideologies of motherhood and the understandings of what is a family in the rulings of the European Court of

Justice (McGlynn 2000, 2001a, 2001b). She analysed a series of cases of the European Court of Justice where this Court has reproduced, and thereby legitimated a traditional vision of motherhood and the role of women in the family and in society generally. She argues that it is important to analyse judicial reasoning, because “once a set of ideas is embedded in a particular discourse, such as judicial reasoning, it becomes particularly difficult to dislodge” (McGlynn 2000: 30). Her understanding of the content of this dominant ‘traditional’ ideology of motherhood follows Ann Oakley (1974: 186): “the belief that all women need to be mothers, that all mothers need their children and that all children need their mothers” (McGlynn 2000: 31). This ideology legitimates the existing sexual division of labour and particular designated roles for fathers (as breadwinners, protectors and authority figures).

She shows how the Court’s approach has been developed through the European Union’s ‘protection of women’ principle, which can override the promotion of equal treatment. This ‘protection of pregnancy and maternity’ has developed to a ‘protection of the dominant ideology of motherhood’. She discusses cases where men wanted leave upon adoption of a child too (in Italy 1983), and were denied this right. The European Court of Justice agreed with Italy that the difference in treatment between women and men “cannot be regarded as [sex] discrimination” because of the “need of the child to bond with the mother” (McGlynn 2001a: 332). This ‘sex’ difference apparently exists even in the case of adoption... In other cases, the Court repeated that it is legitimate to ‘protect the special relationship of a mother with her child’ to deny men access to parental leave. There is no desire to protect or encourage fathers in these rulings. This went on in cases in the 90s, where the Court prohibited discrimination on the basis of pregnancy, all the time repeating the ‘need to protect the special relationship between a mother and her child’.

Similarly in cases on discrimination at work, the Court stated that ‘the aim of (European) community policy was to encourage and if possible adapt working conditions to family responsibilities, and to ensure the protection of women within family life and in the course of their professional activities’. The crucial factor here of course, as McGlynn points out, is what constitutes a family life in need of protection. This is a conception of family life based on the dominant ideology of motherhood: “(...) it is policy to change working conditions to meet *existing* family responsibilities - not that family responsibilities need to change in order to liberate women” (McGlynn 2001a: 339, Emphasis by the author). This is not to say that working conditions do not need to change, but to stress that they would need to change for both women *and* men. In its

understanding of family life, the Court is protecting not women, but especially the existing role of women in the family.

In another piece of work, McGlynn (2001b) analyses the emergence of the family in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, because the Charter, for the first time, recognises the impact of the European Union on families, and the role it plays in shaping, conceptualising and regulating families. The attention of the European Union for families began with the granting of rights to the families of migrant workers, and the increasing impact of the European Union's sex equality laws on family forms and roles. At the beginning, rights were granted to the families of migrant workers to facilitate the free movement of workers, and to strengthen the European economy. The family policy was driven by demographic concerns too. In line with many international human rights texts, the family and family life needs to be protected.

What then is a family in European law and policy? Which families would benefit from the Charter's provisions, and which families would continue to be excluded? This question is central for McGlynn (2001b). She concludes that the 'respect' extended to family life varies according to a hierarchy of relationships. Heterosexual marriage is at the top of the hierarchy, being a protected state and one where there is always 'family life'. In second place are cohabiting heterosexual relationships. Therefore, when a child is born outside of marriage, there may still be a 'family unit'. As long as the cohabiting relationship is closely assimilated to marriage, it may gain some respect and recognition, although the status of unmarried fathers remains quite unclear. At the bottom of the hierarchy are gay, lesbian and transsexual relationships for which there is little respect and even less protection. Homosexual unions do not fall within the right to respect for family life.

Concluding, at the European Union level the concept of family is narrow and traditional, although there are some slight positive developments (such as recognition for cohabitation). The Court justifies its refusal to expand its understanding of what is a family with the 'lack of consensus among member states' to see same sex relationships as equivalent to heterosexual relationships because of the 'need to protect the family'. Therefore the family life to be protected is the traditional heterosexual family, with its designated traditional roles. Across Europe, not all countries have such an excluding definition of what a family is. While some countries, such as the Netherlands have a different and more inclusive understanding of what is a family – a family is defined as: one or more adults taking care of/being responsible for children (State Secretary on Public Health, Welfare and Sports 1996) –, it is also argued (e.g. Stychin 2003) that legislation on same sex partnership and marriage does not 'radicalise' understandings of family, but re-centers the

traditional family through a preference for married couples. This reinforcing of “coupledom” (Stychin 2003: 83) can be visible in the granting of benefits only to couples. This means that exclusion or inclusion in the understandings of families involves not only the definitions of families that are officially put forward, but also a ‘material’ inclusion of all families in any kind of family policies.

Economy, demography, fertility and gender equality: different policy goals meeting

So far, I have shown that there are typical patterns of understanding at European Union level of how ‘families’, ‘mothers’ and economic and demographic dynamics go together. This results in a picture where ‘reconciliation of work and family life’ is a policy goal or a set of policy actions that can be used: primarily to benefit the economy (see Knijn/Smit 2007); or primarily to benefit demographic developments such as increasing fertility; or primarily to benefit gender equality.

In policy making there are many different push and pull factors and a multitude of strategic framing where various actors defend one goal masquerading another. This does not make analysis any easier, but as Stratigaki and Duncan have shown, it can be done. In the context of a comparative European research project, Karin Tertinegg did an excellent analysis of Austrian family politics. Now Austria is a very fine example of a country where demographic ‘concerns’ (the choice of words is intentional here to stress that it is seen to be a problem) take on a nationalistic character. After 1999/2000, when the land slide in the Austrian elections placed the far-right Freedom Party (FPOE), led by the charismatic and controversial Joerg Haider, in second place, a new coalition government between this FPOE and the People’s Party (OEVV) ruled Austria. Typically, a new focus on family emerged in Austria: ‘domestic work’ was now to be ‘valued equally to wage labour’; ‘reconciliation’ was contrasted to the concept of ‘choice (of women) between work and family life’.³ ‘Family’ was de-gendered and the question of having children was politicised. In such a frame, the family is the centre of a good and prosperous Austrian society, and an ideal place to provide for a child’s needs. The pre-modern, multi-child farmer’s family is presented as a response to the perceived danger of ‘erosion of families’ caused by globalisation, modernisation and individualisation. Financial benefits are seen

³ The description of Austrian family policies is taken from Verloo et al. (2005: 137 et seq.).

as stimulants for young people to give birth to more children, and for women in particular to give up employment and care for their children themselves. A demographic aspect is stressed: Austria is presented as a ‘dying nation’, in need of more (Austrian) children in order to keep up the pension and welfare system. Women now constitute a homogenous group of persons who are best capable to perform caring tasks within families. The importance of ‘founding’ a family, for women to perform care work within that family and to value this work equally to waged labour are central to the frame which we found to have become hegemonic after 2000 (Verloo et al. 2005). Men are seen as (main) breadwinners, who, individually, should try to be more active fathers.

In contradiction to the focus on family as sanctuary, there is a simultaneous neo-liberal frame of ‘choice’ and a dual-breadwinner model. As for ‘freedom of choice’, ‘reconciling work and family life’ in the frame of the conservative parties takes on a strong, and contradictory, value frame. Favouring – ‘choosing’ – family and family work seems to be the normative priority, particularly for women. In terms of the two sets of policy responses identified by Duncan, it seems that in Austria, with its visible re-traditionalisation of gender relations in family policy, mostly negative measures are part of the current frame.

In Austria the findings show a similar, yet markedly different, cooptation of gender concepts as at the EU-level (Stratigaki 2004). Stratigaki argues that in the EU a key concept – sharing – was conceptually transformed by its subordination to other policy priorities – labour market –, resulting in loss of potential for changing gender relations (Stratigaki 2004: 3). A cooptation of concepts did also occur in the Austrian frames; however, even if the key concept originally appears to be the same in both the EU and the Austrian frames – more equal sharing – the policy priorities to which this original concept was subordinated in the Austrian frames clearly differ from the EU-level. In contrast to Stratigaki’s findings, a clear labour-market focus was present in Austria only until 1999/2000; afterwards, a different kind of cooptation can be detected, as labour-market objectives are articulated in a more hidden, less obvious way, accompanied by the emergence of a contradictory family-as-sanctuary frame, in which gender equality has become de-articulated as a goal. In such framing, the family is a de-gendered place of important socialisation and tasks for society, and there is a naturalisation of women and men and a re-traditionalisation of the distribution of labour. Even in the frames of the left parties after 2000, female gainful employment is not stressed as much as it was before 2000; rather, ‘reconciliation’ of work and family life for women is stressed. Cooptation in Austrian ‘reconciliation’ frames changed the original meaning of ‘sharing

responsibilities between men and women' to a value frame of founding a family and caring for family members, with a tendency to hold women responsible for the decline of families and birth rates where that value frame is particularly strong. A loss of potential for changing gender relations is apparent. This new frame seems to carry rather contradictory goals: women are to be both primarily responsible for family care and domestic work – and, at the same time, be available for flexible forms of labour – because of their roles as caregivers. 'Choice' between family and work then is a metaphor for market oriented flexibilisation: on the one hand, the new frame identifies women's (full-time) labour-market participation as a potential danger for the family-as-sanctuary; on the other hand, it is seen as inevitable that women must contribute to family income by preferably flexible part-time work.

A comparison of Austria with the Netherlands and Greece on their family policies concludes that the diagnosis of the policy problem that should be addressed by family policies is primarily the division of paid labour, and that representations of the division of unpaid labour or care as a problem are scarce, and seem to be found mainly in the 1990s (in the Netherlands, Austria and at the EU level). Slight echoes on the importance of more involvement of fathers are the only part of this that remains, but these calls are never connected to hard policy. Moreover, a second common pattern is the absence of attention for gender inequality within families as a problem in itself. In most texts, families are constructed as a safe heaven, and problems occurring within families are seen as linked to changes in the structure of families, or to women's participation on the labour market. The implicit reasoning is that problems in families are a new phenomenon. Because there are many problems for society in connection to families, such as low fertility and generational solidarity, and because of the absence of a gender equality perspective, this framing is easily linked to traditional thinking in which families are supposed to produce children for societies, and women are the main persons responsible within families to fulfil this role.

Moreover, it is striking that in all three countries, and even at the EU level, a traditionalisation of thinking about families and the role of women in families can be detected. With the exception of Greece, this seems to be a re-traditionalisation. Linked to shifts in governments to the Right, the analysed texts are gendered, but not from a gender equality perspective. The Austrian frame (since 1999/2000) is the strongest of this kind, seeing the problem to be that women are forced to choose between work and family, and arguing for a family policy that facilitates the right choice, namely the choice for the care of the family. Here, not the gendered division of labour is the problem, but rather, the ungendering of the division of labour is described as a negative

process that should be reversed. Here the findings of our analysis are in line with Duncan (2002), as the frame is linked to the ‘demographic time bomb discourse’, and especially to negative policy responses. The element of putting a higher value to care and to housework is found only in connection to this frame. In Austria, an additional problem is constructed to be the lack of rights of fathers to their children. This frame takes the element of a lack of involvement of fathers in families on board to plea for more fathers’ rights. The soft policy for gender equality is then combined with hard measures supporting father’s rights. In this last frame, the gender problematic seems to be exclusively represented as being female domination over men in families. The above analysis shows attempts to legitimise gender equality by linking measures originating in gender equality policies, such as child care services, part time work and parental leave with other goals such as flexible labour, more employment, more children or better functioning families. This is a problem, as increasingly the accent seems not to be on gender equality, but on traditional gender roles within families. These re-traditionalised frames redirect measures such as reconciliation towards goals that could very well be contradictory to gender equality. The underlying assumption in such frames seems to be that gender equality is not good for families, and hence detrimental to society. The Austrian case shows this most clearly, and Greece to some extent. In the Netherlands and at the EU level, the assumption that gender equality leads to well functioning families seems to predominate, but elements of the opposite can be found too. In the absence of an explicit gender equality family policy these assumptions are not addressed explicitly. As a result, the EU and a country such as the Netherlands create a vacuum that apparently can be filled quite easily by frames that are building upon the idea that gender equality is bad for families and for society, and that, while being presented as gender equality policies, therefore are actually reinforcing gender inequality.

Demographic arguments and gender equality policies in European countries
In the context of an ongoing pan-European comparative research project on gender equality policies⁴, data have been gathered about policies related to reconciliation, care work, tax benefit policies on non-employment, equal pay, marriage and divorce, reproductive rights and violence against women. In this project, policy texts (laws, policy reports, parliamentary debates and civil

⁴ The project *QUING* studies all EU countries, plus two candidate countries –Turkey and Croatia – and the European Union itself (cf. www.quing.eu).

society texts) have been coded using Critical Frame Analysis (Verloo 2007). This section takes a closer look at those policy reports that had an underlying norm of ‘improving the demographic balance’.⁵ This was the case for 17 texts (out of 341 policy reports). Remark that this is only a small number of texts, and a preliminary analysis. The analysis will mainly show *how* arguments are made in the texts that link ‘gender’ and ‘improving the demographic balance’. The texts are from: Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania and Spain. The strong presence of Eastern European countries should come as no surprise, as all of the Central and Eastern European Union member states judge their population growth as insufficient, their fertility rates as too low, and, all have pro-natalist policies (UN 2008). In contrast, only six of the old EU-15 judge their population growth too low, and only three see reason for intervention (Greece, Italy, Austria) (UN 2008). In general, in these policy plans the links between gender (in)equality problems or objectives and demographic balance problems or objectives are of two kinds: one link is about the wellbeing or chances of women as mothers, and another is about reproductive rights and reproductive health. The link can be made either in such a way that the problem of gender inequality or the objective of gender equality is put forward as most important, or so that the demographic problem or objective is put as the finally most important one. Occasionally, texts are written so that they can be read both ways, which obviously serves the strategical goal of enabling support by a wide range of actors. Sometimes also, the ‘problem’ of demographic decline is not presented as linked to gender (in)equality at all.

An ambivalent example is the *Bulgarian National Programme Support Maternity* from 2007 that reasons that demographic crisis and unemployment or low employment of women should be reduced by the state by encouraging measures and policy plans. The main measure that is proposed is to create employment for unemployed women in child care services so that both reconciliation problems (implicitly seen as a reason to not have children) and unemployment are tackled at the same time. The argument of improving the demographic balance is mentioned as an additional reason to ‘have better benefits for mothers’ (Bulgaria, Benefit Maternity Program 2007). “In Bulgaria, the policies target ‘women and men as working parents’ but much more in respect to the demographic crisis than to the economic growth”

⁵ This is a very first preliminary analysis, for which the data from laws, parliamentary debates and civil society texts have not been used yet. I have used internal reports written by researchers in the *QUING* project. Although these reports are not public, I have included them in the bibliography to do justice to the work of these researchers.

(Stoykova 2009: 7). In the Bulgarian case, the reference to demographic balance has nationalistic undertones. There is “a neoconservative view of the model of the family and the gender roles. According to this voice, the demographic crisis is a result of the emancipation processes and the high birth rates of the Roma minority and it is to be solved by the return to the ‘traditional family values’ (of the Bulgarians)” (Stoykova 2009: 12).

The *German text (Together for Germany. With courage and humanity. Coalition Agreement of CDU, CSU and SPD [Gemeinsam für Deutschland. Mit Mut und Menschlichkeit. Koalitionsvertrag von CDU, CSU und SPD] 2005)*, argues that Germany needs more children, and that the well being of families and children needs to be ensured in order to have a higher birth rate. This is juxtaposed with ideas how to financially support families. More generally, this text “has a wider range of frames: After starting off with demographic considerations, it also argues for financial independence of each partner which points to a ‘gender equality’ framing. More generally, it points to the need to secure the well-being and social security of families in order that they have children (‘social justice’)” (Urbanek 2009: 22). The German text is a good example in that it shows how various kinds of arguments are strongly interwoven, and also in that it remains unclear what social units are meant when the text talks about families.

For Germany, other authors have also analysed the current reforms of German family policy, asking the question whether “demography is a push towards gender equality” (Henninger et al. 2008)? They see reconciliation policies as especially important for effects on fertility, and in that sense interpret the reform as “a child-bearing activation” (Henninger et al. 2008: 304). Overall, while they assess the potential impact of the reform to be more towards increasing the labour force participation of mothers, and towards diminishing the support for motherhood as a socially acceptable alternative to employment, they remain critical however, mostly because the reform has stronger incentives for parents with higher incomes, and as such is a ‘double activation’ of highly qualified women to be active on the labour market and have children, while the ‘less worthy’ are prevented from having a family (Henninger et al. 2008: 305). So, they see a positive effect on gender equality on the labour market, but a negative effect on class inequality. What is presented to be about gender equality is de facto dividing women into categories that deserve to be mothers and categories that do not. They do not question the ‘demographic pressure’ as such but rather accept it as an economic or welfare state problem, and they do not elaborate on how gender (in) equality and fertility can be connected other than through its relationships with labour market participation.

There are also texts that frame policies about reproductive rights as linked to demographic balance. An example is the *Estonian State reproductive health programme for 2000-2009*, where the low birth rate is not articulated as a problem, but an increase of births is mentioned as a nice effect of more sexual education and services. In such reasoning, a high number of abortions results in less pregnancies, while more *wanted* pregnancies are the aim. In general, in Estonia, “there is a strong presence of nationalism/demographic balance and Family and justice frames. The emphasis on demography indicates the constant and covert worry in Estonian nowadays politics to guarantee the survival of the nation and to achieve positive natural growth (here then by means of favourable benefit policies that would encourage people to have more children). Family and justice frame is connected with the latter frame, prioritizing the wellbeing of families” (Jaigma 2009: 18).

Similarly, in *Poland*, the theme of demographic crisis is present (but not dominant) in debates on abortion. The 2004 governmental report on *Realization of the Act of family planning, foetus protection and the availability of abortion* mentions the low birth rate and the ‘new model of family’ as social problems. In the case of Poland also texts on reconciliation link gender equality and demographic balance arguments. The more difficult situation of women on the labour market is related to motherhood and problems that women have with reconciliation of work and care. However, in some documents this frame is related with a demographic balance frame, in the sense that discrimination on labour market is presented as a factor for women for delaying decisions on motherhood (Dabrowksa 2009).

In *Romania* also, demography issues are quite central in issues of non-employment. The main objective of the *Government Programme for 2005-2008: Improving the socio-economic balance of the family* is to improve the socio-economic balance of the family. Special social assistance measures are aimed at increasing birth rates through the allocation of financial incentives for families, parents or mothers. The value of durable marriage is affirmed through the allocation of a specific benefit to young couples, provided that both spouses marry for the first time. “Although population growth is a norm too, the measures proposed to increase birth rates give financial incentives to families, parents or mothers only for the first three children. In the Romanian context, this seems to be a measure intended to curb Roma fertility” (Popa 2009: 19). Demography as a central issue is at the heart of the 2006 Romanian *Green Book of Population*. This document sees the causes of the demographic problems in a mix of economic difficulties and the devastating economic effects of transition in Romania, with changes in values and attitudes that now orient the preferences of young couples towards one child, rather than two or

three. The change in preferences for the number of children is associated with women's participation in the labour market and their emancipation. "Other factors are reviewed and considered, but this one particular factor reveals the underlying norm that women are the main caregivers" (Popa 2009: 21). Particularly highly-educated middle-class women are seen as the actors most responsible for the low fertility rates. The most important effect of falling birth rates, the document argues further, is the ageing of the population, and elderly women are most affected by the resulting care and social security deficit. In an attempt to reverse the negative demographic trends, the policy plan proposes to encourage migration to Romania from those countries that have a Romanian population. In a reasoning that resonates highly with Kollontai: "These policy debates (in particular, the *Green Book of Population* in Romania) seem to be informed by the notion that individuals have to be 'productive' in order to be socially useful. There are two ways of achieving a larger population of productive citizens: one is to have more citizens (increasing birth rates); the other is to make citizens active for longer time (promote so called 'active aging'). There is a tension in these policy debates between the norms of social usefulness and productivity and those of respect for the right of individuals and couples to make choices about whether or not to have children and how many of them" (Popa 2009: 22et seq.).

In the *Croatian* case "the demographic decline/balance frame is mostly not gendered (...). Women are not held responsible for demographic decline. In fact demographic decline is seen as an economic problem, being a result of general economic deprivation and not linked to gender equality policies or family/work reconciliation" (Frank 2009:18).

In *Italy*, a 'demographic crisis frame' can be found in the 2007 Minister of Family's introductory speech to the Conference aimed at drafting a National Plan for Families and in the 2006 Annual Relation on the Implementation of Law 40/2004. The Minister "signals how Law 40/2004 on assisted reproduction which should have increased the number of pregnancies and new born babies, has actually led to a decrease of both indicators" (Del Giorgio 2009: 31). In other documents, on the contrary, "the very low Italian birth rate as well as the discrepancy between the average number of children per family (1.35) and the number of children averagely wished by couples (2 or more) is perceived as a grave problem. The parallel increased number of very old persons is also signalled as a grave problem" (Del Giorgio 2009: 31). It seems that in Italy, the reasoning puts the goal of increasing the birth rate as at least as linked to a goal of gender equality (in this case, helping women with fertility problems having babies or helping women to have the number of

children they want). Yet, the wording is degendered (helping couples), so maybe this is not really about gender equality...

Some countries present complex arguments linking different goals. In the *Hungarian* policy plan *Conception of the Governmental Programme on Demographic Policies* from 2003, gender equality is present as a goal: “the transformation of the division of labour frame is most fully present, gender equality is seen as an important goal towards improving the demographic balance, which in turn is argued to be important in order to improve the economy” (Dombos et al. 2009: 18). In the context of policy on sterilization, a “Constitutional Court decision on voluntary sterilization, as well as the left wing MPs borrowing from the reasoning of this decision claim that prohibition of sterilization is not a solution for demographic decline, and that rather an alternative solution of a family friendly environment (mostly financial incentives) should be used instead to solve the demographic crisis” (Dombos et al. 2009: 29). In Hungary, the texts on assisted reproduction are mainly stressing the need “to making people happy by enabling them to have children if they want to” (Dombos et al. 2009: 26). Here we see that gender equality in a degendered way (family friendly) remains an important goal in itself, even if it is seen as more important because it contributes to other important goals such as economic growth and a good demographic balance. The *Spanish* text also articulates to some extent a position on choice related to children as relevant to reconciliation policies (Peterson/Pérez Orozco, 2009). The *Integral Plan for Family Support 2001-2004* has a complex diagnosis linking problems of low birth rate, ageing of the population, reconciliation and women’s incorporation of the labour market. Also, the gender care gap is seen as part of the problem. The Plan highlights that there are two categories of families that have substantial problems with reconciliation: big families and lone parents (single mothers). Also, it represents the gap between the number of children that women/families want to have and the number of children they have, as part of the problem. The Plan wants to support families so that they can make their own decision (on having more children, above all), and has special measures targeting big families or lone parents. The idea is that if policies result in better economic situation of families they will have more children. While the unequal distribution of tasks within the family is part of the diagnosis, according to this Plan it is the role of families to improve sharing responsibilities and promote egalitarian values. So it seems that in Italy, Hungary and Spain, policy reasoning on demography includes attention for how context affects people’s decision to have children or not. This is presented as linked to the demographic crisis in that ‘people do not have the number of children that they would like to have’, representing a

common interest between citizens and the state. While women are sometimes mentioned as the ones that ‘want’ children, the discourse is not explicitly gendered, and does not include a deep analysis.

Reflections

In this chapter I have shown that explicit feminist positions on fertility have often been negative ones, but that explicit feminist positions of the first and second wave of the feminist movement differ(ed) widely in articulating the meaning of motherhood for gender equality. Moreover, for the level of the European Union, I have shown that European family policies to some extent have buried gender equality goals ‘under’ goals to strengthen the economy or the demographic balance. Research on the rulings of the European court showed that the background to understand reconciliation policies and their material impact is the dominant classic patriarchal understanding of what constitutes a family and what are the proper/normal/existing roles in families that are in need of protection or facilitation. I have used Austria to highlight that conservative and nationalistic tendencies can be very close to family policies that accentuate higher fertility rates.

Using data from the *QUING* project, I have tried to show how policies on reconciliation or reproductive rights include a differentiation between categories of women that are deemed worthy of reproducing: women with the Bulgarian, Estonian or Romanian nationality, highly qualified women in Germany and Romania), and women that are not (Roma women in Romania, low qualified women in Germany, women with the right nationality in Bulgaria, Estonia, Romania).

Policies on reconciliation or reproductive rights are also a very ambiguous field of policies in terms of their underlying norms and reasoning: they mix goals on economy, demography and gender equality. Looking at policies of the European Union and of European countries, I am wondering what kind of Trojan horse is reconciliation policies: are policies on reconciliation and reproductive rights presented as a way to protect ‘family values’ but de facto hiding feminist demands on the ability to have children and on childcare in their interior? Or are policies on reconciliation and reproductive rights presented to be about on gender equality, but hiding a strengthening of conventional family roles and an instrumentalization of women for the economy (much like the old Soviet model that resonates with Kollontai’s ideas)? Or do they do both things at the same time, implying that the proof of

the pudding will be in the eating – that is in the specific implementation of measures proposed in specific contexts.

After having looked at some of the literature on fertility, gender equality and demographic issues, I am also wondering about the absence or lack of visibility of feminist voices on this issue. There seems to be an urgent need to articulate some feminist positions. More individualist feminist positions could accentuate the need for women to have a real choice whether or not to have children. A recent article by Hobson and Olah sees the ‘lack’ of fertility as an expression of a lack of ‘capabilities’ that women have to raise children *and* have paid work. Implicitly this seems to be a demand for ‘the right of all women to have children’. Their concept of a ‘birth strike’ as a social phenomenon that reflects the disjuncture between aspirations and expectations and capabilities, is a good example of this. They see economic uncertainty, inequality in families and different risk assessment by women and men when it comes to family formation (Hobson/Olah 2006). But what about more structural feminist positions? Would these imply that ‘sharing’ is a way to improve the demographic balance? Would these have any positions on what the role and rights of men would be? How would a cyborg think about gender equality and the demographic ‘problem’? Is there any articulated feminist position on whether the demographic time bomb exists at all? Whether it is really a serious problem? Whether it needs governmental action? How to deal with it in a gender equal way?

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