

# PATRIOTISM AND PATRIARCHY

The impact of nationalism  
on gender equality



**EXPO**

Kvinna till Kvinna

**Patriotism and Patriarchy –  
The impact of nationalism on gender equality**

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# FOREWORD

In recent years, nationalism has gained a foothold in Sweden and across Europe. Nationalist forces in all countries are mobilising, and talks and cooperation between different nationalist parties and movements are increasing ahead of the European Parliament elections. Who speaks to whom is a sensitive issue. However, the EU is clearly an important arena for European nationalists, fascists and racists.

Nationalism has many enemies, which can all be grouped under the term "the Other". These can include Muslims, immigrants, homosexuals, Jews, communists, transvestites or feminists, for example. The focus varies from country to country and from one political climate to another, but the rejection of feminists and women's rights defenders is something that unites most nationalists. The role of women is primarily that of bearing the nation's children and supporting men as the nation's defenders. A woman should be the hub of the family, the smallest building block of the nation.

With growing nationalism there is also growing concern about its consequences. Women's rights defenders and feminists describe how stronger nationalistic rhetoric feeds a growing disinterest in gender equality and greater support for traditional values about the sanctity of the family and the role of women. In Sweden, the Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna) are calling for limited abortion rights and they state that gender equality has gone "too far". More-

over, women's rights activists feel that opposition to their work is becoming increasingly tangible with physical violence, hate campaigns and social media threats.

This is the background against which this study has been conducted. We wanted to investigate how nationalist parties' rhetoric and policies affect women's opportunities to live their lives, whether these limit their human rights and whether they result in increased violence towards them. We use the Balkans as a starting point, since this region has been characterised by nationalism for many years and there have been reports of how this has negatively affected women's position in society. But the study also takes a look at some nationalist parties in the rest of Europe.

If we are heading towards a society where nationalist visions of what is masculine and feminine are increasingly powerful, what does this mean for women's lives?



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# INTRODUCTION

Nationalism is based on a trinity of people, family and homeland. The survival of the nation and the people cannot be separated from the family. The heterosexual nuclear family with traditional gender roles forms the smallest unit of the nation. When the structure of the nuclear family is challenged, the nation is threatened by extension. Therefore, a conservative view of the family is an integral part of far-right ideology.

Women are primarily considered to be important for two reasons – as biologically responsible for the reproduction of the nation by giving birth to new citizens, and as culturally and socially responsible for the continuation of national traditions, customs and morals.<sup>1</sup> Women often tend to symbolise the whole national identity, as exemplified by the terms “motherland” and “Mother Svea”, the female personification of Sweden.

## Giving birth to the nation

In countries where nationalist ideas dominate, it is common for women’s rights to their own bodies to be limited since their reproductive capacity is often required for national purposes.<sup>2</sup> The right to abortion is often limited or prohibited, and women are encouraged to have more children by both national and religious leaders. This has been the case in many countries in the Western Balkans, for example, both before and after the wars in the 1990s.<sup>3</sup>

Even when the differences between “us” and “others” are to be clarified, nationalism readily uses traditional gender roles and stereotypes. “Their own” women are described as chaste, while “the other” women are labelled whores, or as in anti-Muslim nationalism, that their own women are free while Muslim women are oppressed. Even men from the enemy side can be deemed overly or insufficiently sexual (rapists or impotent).<sup>4</sup> This rhetoric is now familiar in both Sweden and the rest of Europe, where

nationalist groups often refer to Islam and other non-European cultures as rapist cultures.

In nationalist ideology, it is men’s duty to protect the nation state and the women within it, while women in turn are to provide moral and emotional support to men. As a result, men tend to hold most of the decision-making positions (i.e. they govern the country) and they enact laws that control women’s rights and sexuality. Nationalism thus strengthens unequal power relations and structures in society.<sup>5</sup>

## “The Others”

Europe’s nationalist parties are far from united and there are many differences between them, not least because they are so closely tied to their own countries’ ideas about their own specific national identity. However, they do share the basic building blocks of nationalism – the view of what is masculine and feminine, and safeguarding what is their own, as well as scepticism towards what is foreign. Who “the Others” might be can vary, but nationalist rhetoric describes them as a threat to one’s self and national identity.<sup>6</sup> In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders’ anti-

Muslim rhetoric is formulated against a backdrop of liberalism; in France, the country’s colonial past affects the party’s view of immigration; and in Sweden, where the Swedish self-image is based on a history of international solidarity, the Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna) have launched a migration policy that is designed to appear empathetic. In the Western Balkans, the Bosnian, Croat and Serb ethnicities have confronted each other with strong nationalist rhetoric before, during and after the wars in the 1990s.

In Spring 2014, a new government was elected in Serbia. The results of the election seem to indicate that the country’s nationalist past is beginning to fade. The Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), which has profiled itself as an anti-corruption and pro-European party, won an outright majority and there are now no openly nationalist parties represented in parliament. Serbia is seeking EU membership, which places demands on reforms about issues that do not suit the nationalist agenda, such as women’s rights. Croatia went through a similar process prior to becoming a member state in 2013.

Unfortunately, there is reason to believe that the reforms were somewhat of a façade for the EU rather than real change. Rada Borić at the Croatian Center for Women Studies says, “We are seeing a terrible backlash now, after EU entry.

It’s as though we’ve washed our hands. As though we have a degree in human rights, and now we can carry on as before.”

## Normalised rhetoric

European nationalist parties are polishing their messages to have a greater chance of being elected to parliaments, as in the Balkans, to come closer to the EU. Yet this does not mean that the ideas disappear. Instead they are normalised with the help of finely tuned rhetoric. Slowly but surely the parties are becoming increasingly accepted. Other parties have



to take them into consideration, and they are enjoying an increasing presence in political debate and the media. This development is in turn paving the way for even more extreme political forces that have previously been completely taboo. It is no coincidence that the analysis in the online newspaper of the racist Party of the Swedes (Svenskarnas parti) was “Bollen är i rullning” (lit. “Ball in motion”) when the Sweden Democrats were elected into the Swedish parliament.<sup>7</sup> These movements have the political space to launch more serious anti-immigration and nationalistic attacks.



### Religious influence

In many cases it can be hard to distinguish between what is politically driven nationalism and what emanates from other influential actors in society. There are many stakeholders behind the current nationalist agenda, and these strengthen and drive each other's messages.

For example, the religious communities have played a major role in the Balkans to fire up resistance towards abortion and a prohibition on the types of family constellations that do not follow the traditional nuclear family. Or as a Bosnian human rights activist put it: “If you want to hear a religious message, talk to a politician. If you want a political message, talk to a priest.”

The spread of nationalism in recent years has gone hand in hand with the fixation on so-called traditional values that have appeared on the “high politics” agenda. For example, Russia managed to get a resolution entitled Promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms through a better understanding of traditional values of humankind passed in the UN Human Rights Council in 2011–2012, although it is traditional values that are often used as a defence for human rights violations, such as

female genital mutilation and statutory prohibitions against homosexuality.<sup>8</sup> Several countries in Europe, including Macedonia, Poland and Spain, have limited the right to abortion or have governments that are pushing for such proposals to be approved. And in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, women's rights defenders from countries in the Middle East and northern Africa are providing reports of how extremist and patriarchal forces are gaining greater influence, which has meant that women have lesser opportunities to live free lives.

### Method and execution

This study is divided into two parts: one concentrates on the Western Balkans, a region with a long history of strong, destructive nationalism, and the other provides a detailed look at five successful nationalist parties in Europe. Both parts focus on issues that affect family policy, since these can often be clearly linked to the situation for women's rights.

Political parties have been selected with the help of a three-point definition used by the Expo Foundation to identify far-right nationalist parties:

- The nation is most important, and national identity goes before individual interests and group interests.
- The people, “the own”, are united by a shared cultural – and in some cases biological – heritage, language, sexuality and religion.
- “The Others” are excluded. In a nationalist society, minorities are given a subordinated position, or are to be excluded through repatriation, isolation or closed borders.

In the part about Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, we have selected a couple of parties in each country that match one or more of the criteria above. If several parties matched the criteria,

we chose the largest parties or the one that, despite being smaller, has enjoyed a breakthrough on issues concerning family policy.

The material is based on information from the party programmes and interviews with party leaders, representatives from the country's official gender equality institutes, academics from centres for women studies and women human rights defenders. This information has been supplemented with official statements on issues concerning nationalism and women's rights.

The example from the Balkans should be regarded in its own right, but also as a depiction of how political nationalism affects a country's development. This is particularly interesting as a background to the second part of the study in which we analyse five European nationalist parties that have grown increasingly stronger and have become power factors in their respective countries. Here we have chosen to look at the widest possible selection of parties to show the different ways in which nationalist views of the family can come to expression. ■

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Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia are permeated with strong nationalism that has had a major impact on the countries' politics for many years.

Women are under constant pressure from society to devote their lives to staying at home and taking care of large families. At the same time, women are having to deal with deteriorating conditions on the labour market, female politicians are facing opposition – even from within their own parties – and activists fighting for women's and LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) persons human rights are being threatened and persecuted.

Welcome to a world where nationalism is setting the rules.

**Text: Christina Wassholm**

**Illustrations: Malin Erixon**

# HATRED AND HOUSEWIVES

The current political situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia is rooted in the wars that took place in the region between 1991 and 1999. The parties that were dominant during the 1990s are still active in all three countries, and several of them remain in positions of power. Mobilisation and support for the war demanded there to be a fear of people with other ethnicities or religions, a fear of “the Others”, grounded in a feeling that one's own group was under threat. In many respects, the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s were about creating identities as Bosniaks, Croats or Serbs, using religion, history and the own group's suffering during the wars as building blocks.

During the wars, there was a strong link between nationalism and gender, both in terms of rhetoric and action. For example, people spoke of their own country as “a woman raped by the enemy”. It is a well-known fact that systematic rape was used as warfare. Raping the women of “the Others” was an attack on the nation's core. Yet most of the perpetrators of these war crimes have still not been punished.

After the wars, the stereotypical gender roles have remained – men are still regarded as the ones who should be active in defending and leading the nation, while women are to be protected and expected to take responsibility for reproduction and the family.

Nationalism in Balkan politics is also a deeply rooted basis for decision-making and prioritisations, and it is an increasingly complex force in society. Among the larger, more established parties, only

a few now feature extreme nationalist opinions about their own people's superiority and the need to protect the nation from “the Others” in their official documents. However, this has been a common feature in their history, which they have tried, in some cases quite successfully, to address over the years. Efforts from civil society, EU approximation and democratisation processes have played a significant role in this development.

For Bosnia-Herzegovina, the presence of representatives from the international community, and the fact that they have the mandate to punish elected politicians who are seen to violate the peace agreement, has been decisive.

## The beacon of patriotism

Many parties do, however, highlight patriotism as an important theme in their party programmes.

The Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), for example, writes that “the strengthening of national self-esteem and the own nation's significance should be achieved through the reintroduction of traditional and enduring moral values as the foundation for family, society and the state. Real patriotism and education of young people in a spirit of love for the motherland is the basis of national politics.”

The Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) in Republika Srpska (one of Bosnia-Herzegovina's two entities) writes that the entity “first and foremost is a state for the Serbian people, but that it now has a multi-ethnic character following the decision of the

Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina.” It adds that Republika Srpska is a prerequisite for the survival of the Serbian people in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HDZ BiH) also states the importance of a separate territory for its own (Croatian) group in its party programme. The party wants Bosnia-Herzegovina to consist of three equal parts, divided between the constituent peoples (Bosniaks, Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs) with major autonomy for each entity.

The Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) lists maintaining Serbia's territorial integrity as the first of ten principles in its party programme. This means that Kosovo, the former autonomous province in southern Serbia, which declared its independence in 2008, should not be recognised. “Kosovo and Metodija<sup>1</sup> are the heart of Serbia and a fundamental part of our nation's territory.” The second principle states that the party has a responsibility for Serbs outside the country's borders, in particular those in the various parts of the former Yugoslavia. It mentions Republika Srpska in particular, and that Serbia and Republika Srpska should eventually, and peacefully, form a united state.

It is not just the political parties that, to varying extents, still have policies marked by nationalism in their party programmes, statements and specific prioritisations. The religious communities, which have stepped forward and become strong actors since the collapse of the socialist secular Yugoslavia, play a major role in constructing national



identity in each respective country. Most political parties have close relations with these communities and national leaders often make appearances with religious leaders. It is not controversial at all to turn to them for advice on important political decisions. In Croatia, for example, the Catholic Church has close ties with right-wing parties such as the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). The Serbian Orthodox Church also has a lot to say about politics, as do the three largest religious groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina. For example, in all three countries, it is the representatives of the dominant religious community who are responsible for religious education in schools.

### Groups prone to violence

All three countries are grappling with groups that are prone to violence and mostly include young men who, to varying degrees, receive support from political parties and religious communities. In Serbia, for example, there are right-wing extremist groups known as *Obraz* and 1389. A violent attack during the 2010 Gay Pride march in Belgrade showed

their ability to mobilise. Around 6,000 people are estimated to have participated in street protests against the parade, led by the two aforementioned groups and with support from football hooligans. *Obraz* was banned by the Constitutional Court of Serbia in 2012<sup>2</sup>, but was still active ahead of the planned Gay Pride parade in Belgrade in October 2013, when their slogans and stickers could be found on buildings all over the city.

Despite the court ban, the general attitude of the state shows signs of a major unwillingness to seriously deal with these groups and the views they represent. In cases where representatives of the groups have been put on trial, they have received relatively mild sentences.<sup>3</sup> And the media sometimes invites them to participate in debates about gender equality with human rights organisations, for example, even though they openly express racist and homophobic views.

The far-right extremist Bosnian Movement of National Pride in Bosnia-Herzegovina uses violence in its fight against

homosexuality. The country has also witnessed an increased presence of extremist Wahhabi groups that are promoting an Islamic fundamentalist agenda.<sup>4</sup>

In Croatia, the far right does not have any major political influence, largely because the right-wing HDZ is so dominant and has partially integrated the more extreme alternatives' demands and rhetoric into its politics.<sup>5</sup> The organisations that do exist base their ideas on the fascist Ustaša movement, which collaborated with the Nazis during the Second World War. They want to widen Croatia's territory according to where ethnic Croats live, and base the nation on Catholic Christianity. The Croatian National Front is an active group that has organised anti-Serb and anti-government protests.

The ongoing (spring 2014) trial in the International Criminal Court, in which Croatia and Serbia are accusing each other of genocide, is an example of how the events of the 1990s continue to shape relations in the region twenty years on and add fuel to the collective feeling of being victims of the wars.

## BALKAN PARTIES IN THE STUDY

### ● DSS (Serbia)

**Party name:** Democratic Party of Serbia  
**Ideology:** National conservative, Christian democratic, anti-European and anti-NATO.

**Founded:** 1992, after a nationalist faction broke away from the Democratic Party.

**Party leader:** Vojislav Koštunica has been the leader since its formation. He was one of the opposition leaders in the fight against Milošević and took over as Serbia's president after the latter was deposed. Koštunica stepped down after the last election in Serbia, when the party failed to enter parliament for the first time. The DSS was in power from 2004 until 2008, and Koštunica served as prime minister throughout this period.  
**From the party programme:** The Serbian Orthodox Church, as the oldest institution of the Serbian people, must be protected and supported. The demographic rehabilitation of Serbia is one of the most important goals, which requires initiatives to support families and protect mothers and children. The strengthening of national self-esteem and their own significance shall occur through the reintroduction of traditional and enduring moral values as the foundation of the family, society and the state. Real patriotism and education of young people in the spirit of love for the motherland is the foundation of national policies.

### ● SNS (Serbia)

**Party name:** Serbian Progressive Party  
**Ideology:** Conservative, centre-right  
**Founded:** 2008, by former members of the Serbian Radical Party. The party has strong links to the right-wing populist Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) and Putin's United Russia.

**Party leaders:** When Tomislav Nikolić was elected as president of Serbia, he resigned as party leader and was succeeded by Aleksandar Vučić. In 1990, Vučić held a number of top positions within the Serbian Radical Party. For a long time he defended war criminal Ratko Mladić and in 2007 he organised a high-profile protest in which a street in Belgrade that was named after the assassinated Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić (opposition leader who came to power after the fall of Milošević) was renamed Ratko Mladić Boulevard. In recent years, Vučić has changed his rhetoric and now presents himself as pro-European.

**From the party programme:** Maintain Serbia's territorial integrity (including Kosovo). Help Serbs outside the nation's borders, especially in the former Yugoslavia and Republika Srpska in particular. Wants Serbia and Republika Srpska to form one state.

## Backlash in Croatia

The following occurred in Croatia within the space of just a few weeks in November and December 2013: After the men's national football team had won a World Cup qualifying match on home soil, one of the players, Josip Šimunić, grabbed the microphone and shouted "Za dom" (For the fatherland) at the audience, to which tens of thousands replied "Spremni!" (Ready!). The salute was used by the Ustaše during the Second World War and was picked up again during the war in the 1990s.

Just over a week later, Croatians voted in a referendum about a constitutional amendment, which now explicitly states that marriage is a covenant reserved for a man and a woman. During this time, citizens' initiatives gathered enough signatures to bring about another referendum, this time about the law giving national minorities the right to signs in their own language if they make up at least 30 percent of residents in a municipality. The promoters wanted the percentage to be increased to 50 percent. This was in response to disturbances in the city of Vukovar in eastern Croatia about signs written in (Serbian) Cyrillic.

"We are seeing a terrible backlash now, after EU entry. It's as though we've washed our hands. As though we have a degree in human rights, and now we can carry on as before. Look at Vukovar. Nationalism always comes to expression in relation to minorities. It's the same with the referendum about marriage," says Rada Borić at the Croatian Center for Women's Studies, an organisation that runs courses on gender and women's studies in Zagreb.

She is clear to stress that this is not an anti-European trend, but rather that it has become more important for certain groups to preserve those things identified as being specifically Croatian values.

Nela Pamuković, an activist at the peace organisation Center for Women War Victims, which also works with violence against women, believes that nationalism in Croatia is omnipresent.

"Today's Croatia was built on the premise that we never questioned nationalism; not even left-wing or liberal forces did. All parties are populist and mainly care about getting votes, and the majority of the electorate is conservative. That's not surprising after twenty years of strong influence from the Church and the consequences of the war in form of a more traditional society," she says.

When the most right-wing conserva-

tive parties are in opposition, such as HDZ in Croatia, they are bolder and more outspoken in their opinions, compared to when they are in power. And the government parties have to take a stance on the HDZ's actions, which drives the debate in a direction that suits the opposition.<sup>6</sup> During the 1990s, under the leadership of Franjo Tuđman, the HDZ was the strongest political driving force for an independent Croatia, and it had a clear nationalist profile. The party has never been anti-European, as for example the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) during the 1990s, and Tuđman was one of the first to say that Croatia should join the EU. During its many years in power, in particular between 2003 and 2011, the HDZ has led the country's EU integration process and it has thus been forced to polish its language.

## Sugar-coated patriotism in Serbia

The parties that were in power in Serbia during the war years have now made a comeback – and they have undergone somewhat of a transformation. There were hopes that things would take another direction when the Serbian people rose up against Slobodan Milošević on 5 October 2000.<sup>7</sup> However, the disappointment with the way that the former opposition governed the country meant that Milošević party, the Socialist SPS party, was voted back into power just eight years after being deposed. And four years after that, during the 2012 elections, voters once again put their trust into the parties that had governed the country during the 1990s. The SPS was able to form a coalition government with the newly formed Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), a breakout faction of the Serbian Radical Party, which took part in the war with paramilitary troops and whose leader Vojislav Šešelj is facing charges for war crimes in the Hague. During elections in 2014, these parties managed to carve out an even stronger position for themselves.

Since the early 2000s, politics in Serbia has been dominated by questions about the country's territorial integrity and its identity. Keeping Kosovo as a part of Serbia has been at the top of the political agenda, at a high cost, both economically (much of Serbia's budget goes to maintaining the Serbian institutions in Kosovo) and politically. EU integration was long presented as an antithesis: either to work to keep Kosovo or get closer to the EU. The very few politicians and activists who did openly speak for Koso-





vo's right to independence were attacked by nationalist politicians.

In the last year, the political discussion has changed, since Serbia both signed a historic cooperation agreement with Kosovo and has begun its membership negotiations with the EU.

The Belgrade Center for Women Studies provides courses in women's studies and publishes articles on gender studies. Katarina Lončarević, who works at the centre, says that it is hard to single out one party as "the nationalist one". According to her, the problem is that nationalism is everywhere.

"All the major parties flirt with nationalism in one way or another. Some just during election campaigns, others use it as a way of communicating with citizens. What you often hear is that we are a Serbian people who share essential values that need to be protected. This is expressed most clearly by both politicians and the Church with respect to issues concerning the nation's future. Like Kosovo, and the demographic situation."

Slavica Stojanović from the feminist peace organisation Women in Black agrees.

"It's not really hate propaganda any more, but rather more like sugar-coated patriotism. But we still recognise it. We've lived with it for more than twenty years. There is an abstract psychological

feeling that we are moving backwards. That's what's draining me of energy. We find it difficult to talk about growing nationalism, because we've simply never lived without it or seen any party openly speaking out against it."

### Ethnic deadlock in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Bosnia-Herzegovina appears to be stuck in an ethno-nationalist division. The country has a complicated constitution, created as part of the peace negotiations in Dayton in 1995, and it is in desperate need of reform. There are three constituent peoples (Bosnian Croats, Bosnian Serbs and Bosniaks), two entities (Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina), ten cantons, a tripartite presidency that rotates between the constituent peoples and so on. No political issue seems to be able to escape ethnic deadlock, and nothing is allowed to be larger than what fits into a canton or an entity. People can sometimes be denied treatment in hospitals closest to them, just because it is located on the wrong side of the entity boundary line.

The nationalist rhetoric in Bosnia-Herzegovina intensified in 2013 ahead of a census that was held in October. What would in most places simply have been a technicality became an extremely politicised issue in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In an

#### ● HSP-AS (Croatia)

**Party name:** Croatian Party of Rights – Dr Ante Starčević

**Ideology:** Calls itself right-wing conservative.

**Founded:** 2009 by a breakaway group from the Croatian Party of Rights.

**Party leader:** Ruža Tomašić. The party is part of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group. In the most recent parliamentary elections, the party managed to obtain one seat in parliament, in a coalition with the far-right extremist Croatian Pure Party of Rights.

**From the party programme:** Greater support to war veterans. More time on national television dedicated to the war of the 1990s, as well as in schools and textbooks. Defend the foetus's right to life from conception. Family based on marriage, which is reserved for men and women. Against other forms of cohabitation.

#### ● HDZ (Croatia)

**Party name:** Croatian Democratic Union

**Ideology:** National conservative, Christian democratic

**Party leader:** Tomislav Karamarko

**Founded:** 1989, by Franjo Tuđman, who later became the first president of an independent Croatia and signatory of the Dayton Agreement. He has been in power in Croatia between 1990-2000 and 2003-2011.

**From the party programme:** The most important human community is the family, and maintaining it, and the value system that is linked to it, is of utmost importance. "For us who as a party accept Christian ethics, the right to life also means a right to life for the unborn child." With respect to the war in the 1990s, the party programme states that Croatia waged a legitimate defence and war of liberation of its territory against a major Serbian aggression.

#### ● SNSD (Bosnia-Herzegovina)

**Party name:** Alliance of Independent Social Democrats

**Ideology:** Calls itself social democratic, but can also be seen as Serbian separatist.

**Founded:** 1996

**Party leaders:** Milorad Dodik, who is also President of Republika Srpska and a proponent of Republika Srpska's independence from the rest of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Became a member of the Socialist International 2006, but was expelled in 2011 for its nationalist and extremist viewpoints.<sup>1</sup>

**From the party programme:** The family is the basis of society and is threatened by the events of the war, the economic downturn and moral crisis. To restore a place and respect for the family in society, as well as establishing new, "real" values is the basis for "the moral and spiritual reconstruction of healthy and sustainable communities in the future."

attempt to depoliticise the census, it was decided that three questions in the survey were not compulsory – namely ethnicity, religion and language. Yet it was precisely these questions that political and religious leaders of the three constituent peoples encouraged their supporters to answer, using campaign-like rhetoric. As the country’s constitution is based on a division between the three largest ethnic groups, its representatives now feared that their own group would get less power if the results of the census showed that they were fewer in number than previously thought.

“If we are more than 50 percent, then Bosnia will be a Bosniak state and we will dominate the other two peoples.” These were the words of Sejfudin Tokić, leader of a campaign that encouraged people to declare themselves as Bosniaks and Muslims in the census.<sup>8</sup> And the Catholic Archbishop in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cardinal Vinko Puljić, wrote a letter to his parish members, saying that it was their “moral obligation” to declare themselves as being Catholic.<sup>9</sup>

The sister parties HDZ in Croatia and HDZ BiH also joined forces to encourage Croats to declare their ethnicity in the census, as well as their religious denomination and language<sup>10</sup>, while the Bosnian Serb party SNSD tried to influence the citizens of Republika Srpska. “My message to the citizens is not to miss the opportunity, under the heading of citizenship, to choose citizenship in Republika Srpska and to declare their nationality, religion and linguistic affiliation,” Milorad Dodik, SNSD’s party leader, said in a televised interview.<sup>11</sup>

The main difference in comparison to the nationalism of the 1990s can be seen

in what has become politically correct in public. Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Eastern Sarajevo, describes how nationalism in the country is now disguised in political parties that describe themselves as being right wing, centre or moderate. In their party programmes they say that they are open to everyone.

“We don’t have any ultranationalist parties now. Such kinds of statements are heard more and more infrequently. Parties are under pressure from the international community, so they have been forced to polish their rhetoric,” she says.

But Azra Čaušević from the organisation Okvir in Sarajevo that works for LGBTQ rights, stresses that they are just the same; they are just packaging themselves differently.

“Today’s nationalism cannot be separated from that seen during the 1990s. It’s the same, it’s about who is a worthy member of a particular group according to strictly defined criteria. It is based on masculinity and femininity, and it is tied to reproduction. The foundation is based on legends about soldiers as heroes, and women who need to be defended because they are the bearers of the nation’s identity.”

## Victim role underpins nationalism

Something that characterises nationalism in the three countries is the perception that their own ethnic groups have been wrongly treated.

“All people in the former Yugoslavia bear a feeling of being victims, and this is the very foundation for nationalism. We don’t know how not to be nationalistic. And there is no public debate about it,” says Snežana Jakovljević from the organisation Sandglass in Kruševac, Serbia, which works with violence against women and seeks to strengthen women’s political participation.

The victim role is directly linked to the history of war, but it is also about how people today live with the disappointment of the lack of jobs, development and opportunity.

Svjetlana Knežević is involved in the running of the Libela web portal, which monitors feminist and gender issues in Croatia. She points to the economic crisis and capitalism as the main reasons for today’s nationalism.

“The number of unemployed people is growing, people are hungry, prices are rising, people are angry – the easiest thing is to blame someone else. That is a typical hotbed for nationalism.”

In today’s Croatia, “someone else” is always a minority group such as the Roma people, Serbs, atheists or homosexuals.

The transition from socialism’s social security to market-oriented neoliberal economic systems that the countries of the former Yugoslavia are going through has been and remains a painful process. Trade unions are divided and weak, and the financial crisis of 2008 has damaged an already weak economy. Katarina Lončarević from the Belgrade Center for Women Studies in Serbia sees the need for new strategies to respond to the new challenges.

“Feminists have been actively engaged in working against nationalism during the 1990s, and are now working to draw a line under that part of our history. But we also need to be clear about what is happening now – this revamped nationalist agenda, what it means for our daily lives. Because it has an impact on women’s situation in other ways than it did during the 1990s. Now it is more strongly linked to a global trend, to the financial systems and insecurity on the labour market. Nationalism is now based on a fear of “the Others” who want to steal our jobs. We are so much more defenceless than we were when the state had more control over the economy.”

### ● SDA (Bosnia-Herzegovina)

**Party name:** Party of Democratic Action

**Ideology:** Social conservative, centre-right, Islamic democratic

**Founded:** 1990 by Alija Izetbegović as the first Bosniak nationalist party since the multiparty system was banned in Yugoslavia after the Second World War.

**Party leaders:** Sulejman Tihić. Bakir Izetbegović, the son of the party’s founder, is the party’s representative in the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**From the party programme:** Begins with: “With faith in God and a desire to stick to moral values that come from basic religious and ethical principles...”. In favour of family values as a basis for a stable and healthy society, in particular for “women – mothers” and families with many children. Wants stronger efforts to stop the negative birth rate trend.

### ● HDZ BiH (Bosnia-Herzegovina)

**Party name:** Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Ideology:** Christian democratic, Croat-nationalistic, conservative

**Founded:** 1990 in Sarajevo, as a Bosnian sister party of the Croatian HDZ.

**Party leader:** Dragan Čović. He was the Bosnian-Croat representative in the rotating presidency from 2002 to 2005, when he was removed from office by the international community’s High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, because of suspicions of an abuse of power. He was sentenced to five years in prison, but was later acquitted

for this, as well as for later charges of corruption and abuse of power. Since 2013, he has served as Chairman of the House of Peoples in the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**From the party programme:** Wants Bosnia-Herzegovina to consist of three equal parts, divided between the three statutory peoples (Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs) with large autonomy for each entity. Sees the family as society’s founding group. In favour of specific social rights, as well as the protection of the family and motherhood, as a guarantee for national and moral growth. Unborn children have a right to life.

## No room for gender equality

“I feel that nationalism means there is a focus on issues concerning the nation and the territory, and that there is no space for matters that concern people in their daily lives. This creates a large gap between politicians’ reality and our reality. And this places women on the side lines, and pushes them back into the private sphere, as mothers, wives, people who take care of the family,” says Snežana Jakovljević from Sandglass in Serbia.

When looking at the last elections in each country, it becomes clear that gender equality issues were completely absent in the political debate. During parliamentary elections in Serbia in March 2014, the election campaign was dominated by subjects such as economic reform, fighting corruption and creating

jobs. This broke the trend of all previous elections since the beginning of this century, which had all focused on the status of Kosovo. Parties that profiled themselves as patriotic or nationalist, such as DSS, Dveri, Movement 1389 and the Serbian Radical Party, did not make it into parliament.

Parliamentary elections in Croatia in December 2011 were also mostly about the economy, the unemployment rate of 17 percent and fighting corruption. HDZ’s former party leader, and Croatia’s former prime minister, Ivo Sanader, had just been arrested on suspicion of corruption and the opposition profiled itself in relation to this.<sup>12</sup> The newly elected Prime Minister of Croatia, Zoran Milanović from the Social Democratic Party said: “We have modern values in our hearts, but we also respect traditions.”<sup>13</sup>

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the last general election was held in October 2010. As usual, the election campaign was marked by nationalistic messages. Milorad Dodik, President of Republika Srpska and the SNSD party leader, said that he would fight for the preservation of the entity and against centralisation, while HDZ BiH’s Dragan Čović wanted to create a separate Bosnian Croat entity.<sup>14</sup> In one statement Dodik said: “Republika Srpska forever, Bosnia only for as long as it has to exist.”<sup>15</sup> As before, the electorate voted in accordance with their ethnic affiliations.<sup>16</sup>

The need for constitutional reform returns as an issue during every election. However, no changes are ever made, as always all the parties profile themselves by placing their own ethnic group ahead of the country’s collective interests.<sup>17</sup>

In all three countries, there is a hierarchy of issues on the political agenda. National projects come first and gender equality issues are secondary.

And it is not just gender equality. Azra Čaušević from the Okvir organisation in Bosnia-Herzegovina believes that politicians find it convenient not to have to take responsibility for more everyday issues.

“It’s in their interests to ensure that the situation is always on the verge of collapse, and that there are constant political crises that distract the focus from other issues – like the fact that we have war criminals in parliament and youth unemployment is sky-high.”

## Women’s bodies belong to the nation

“Croatian women need to start having three, four or five children, otherwise we won’t exist for much longer. Our country will be emptied and other people who are not Croats will move here,” Mate Knezović, party leader of the Family Party (Obiteljska Stranka, OS), said at a meeting in the Croatian town of Sibenik in late March 2014. The meeting was arranged by an alliance including eight right-wing parties that have joined forces ahead of EU parliamentary elections in May.<sup>18</sup>

Nationalistic language often uses feminine metaphors such as “motherland” to refer to the nation. Female sexuality is linked to nation-building and is tasked with maintaining the national identity. In nationalist ideologies the nation becomes a patriarchal family, in which men are responsible for defence and women for reproductive duties.<sup>19</sup> This link was most clearly visible dur-





ing the 1990s, in particular in Slobodan Milošević policy towards Kosovo. Demographics and women's responsibility to bear Serbian children were a central part of the propaganda, alongside the horror that Kosovo Albanians would take over by having more children. The Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Pavle, referred to the low birth rate among Serbs as the "White Plague" in his Christmas speech in 1995. He accused Serbian women of not fulfilling their duty to the nation as mothers.<sup>20</sup> At around the same time, Franjo Tuđman attacked the right to abortion in Croatia, and called women who had abortions "enemies of the state".<sup>21</sup>

Even today, demography is an important political issue in these countries. The wars of the 1990s and the difficult

economic and political situation that followed, has meant that the population in the region is shrinking.

The population of Bosnia-Herzegovina in particular has declined considerably, largely due to the large number of refugees who left the country during and after the war. Croatia and Serbia have also seen a sizeable portion of their populations seeking a better future abroad. The economic situation has also meant that young people are more restrictive when it comes to having children. Small communities are dying out and there are concerns about how to provide for an ageing population.

The Croatian HSP-AS writes in its party programme that influence from the West has had an impact on the demographic situation in Croatia, for ex-

ample, by spreading a trend of calling families with many children into question. The party therefore suggests that a special family ministry should be given responsibility to highlight family values and reinstate the view that the family is society's most important building block.<sup>22</sup>

The Bosniak SDA wants to provide special protection to mothers and families with several children in a way that responds to the negative demographic situation. They want to invest more in pre-school programmes and "systematic initiatives" to encourage families to have more children.<sup>23</sup>

The Serbian DSS says that "the demographic rehabilitation of Serbia is one of the main goals," and that population growth is a necessary investment in the

## ● ABORTION RIGHTS

All three countries: Right to abortion until week 10 at the woman's own request. Beyond 10 weeks the approval of a medical commission with a doctor/gynaecologist is required. Minors need their parents' approval. The existing law entered into force in 1978.<sup>30</sup>

future for the Serbian people. It states that there is a need for initiatives to support families and protect mothers and children.<sup>24</sup>

The anti-abortion position that Tuđman so directly expressed twenty years ago certainly still exists in Croatia today. Both IVF<sup>25</sup> and the right to abortion have been up for debate in the media several times, generally always on the initiative of the Catholic Church.

"There will be an attack on women's reproductive rights. I can't say what it will look like, just that it's coming," Svjetlana Knežević from Libela in Croatia says emphatically.

"But if that became a political debate, I am certain that the women's movement would stand united for the right to abortion," she adds.

Now that Croatia is a member of the EU, Tuđman's successors in HDZ are already voting for a limitation on the right to abortion.<sup>26</sup> Marija Boban is a member of HDZ's executive committee and president of the party's women's association. She proudly says that her party was involved in creating an independent Croatia.

"The EU is richer if we all preserve and nurture our national values. We are a patriotic party, we want to preserve Croatia, but we are not nationalistic. We respect other parties and cultural diversity."

The party programme says nothing about being against abortion, but several individual representatives have expressed support for a ban. Marija Boban is one of them. She has support from the smaller HSP-AS party's leader, Ruža Tomašić. As the MEP with most votes in Croatia's first European elections, she provoked a lot of media attention when she spoke out against women's decision-making powers when it comes to abortion during a debate in the European Parliament in mid-January 2014. She said that the day that women can get pregnant without men's help, they can also make their own decisions about abortion.<sup>27</sup>

"You can see that I don't welcome some women's 'it's my body and I can do what I want with it' attitude," Ruža Tomašić says.

There is a poster hanging at the entrance of the St Alexander Nevsky church in the Dorćol district of central Belgrade. It depicts a woman carelessly throwing a baby over her shoulder. "Choose life!" it states. Stopping all abortions has been the Serbian Orthodox Church's official position since the summer of 2013. When the Holy Synod convened, it was announced that the Church had decided to support a general ban, except for certain medical reasons. The Church used the term "child murder" when it compared the annual number of abortions in Serbia with the disappearance of a small town in its press release. The official figure is 23,000 abortions per year, but this is thought to be a gross underestimate with the real number being up to six times as high.

In Yugoslavia, the right to abortion was already instituted in 1978, and Serbian women now have the right to abortion until the tenth week of gestation. Serbia's health minister was quick to speak out in defence of the legislation following the Church's press release.<sup>28</sup> Among the political parties, only the nationalist party Dveri, which is not represented in parliament, declared its support for the abortion ban. Dveri's leader, Vladan Glšić, pointed to the "catastrophic demographic situation, the so-called 'White Plague'," when explaining why it was important to limit the right to abortion.<sup>29</sup>

When governing political parties need to abide by EU regulations and are subject to a certain degree of monitoring, it is the religious communities, citizens' initiatives and smaller parties that instead pursue the more controversial issues. This interplay often suits the established political parties.

## Traditional gender roles

"Nationalism in Bosnia-Herzegovina is largely tied to clerical leaders and uses primitive images of 'God in heaven', 'head of the nation' and 'pater familias' in the home. And all those mentioned in this holy trinity are men. So the decision-makers are men, not women," says Professor Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović at the University of Eastern Sarajevo in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Nationalism's demands on limited and fixed identities means that men and women are pushed into traditional gender roles in which men are active, defend the nation and make decisions, while women are primarily responsible for reproduction and the home (family). The traditional gender roles still have a

strong position in the Balkans today. It is common to talk about a "retradition-alisation"<sup>31</sup> of society from the 1990s onwards, in comparison to memories of the socialist era. Back then it was (almost) as likely for an engineer building a bridge to be a woman as a man, even if the unpaid work in the home, like today, was largely performed by women.

Nowadays the traditional, and limited, gender roles are expressed in many different ways in daily life. As for example when women and men are frequently described in the media as belonging to the "beautiful" or "strong" gender respectively. Both Katarina Lončarević from the Belgrade Center for Women Studies in Serbia and Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović see how the younger generation, their students, have adopted these gender roles. Katarina Lončarević highlights the media's role as carrying the traditional values and provides an example of how prominent women – politicians, business leaders, sports people – often tend to talk more about their private rather than their professional roles.

"This is definitely the result of the nationalist discourse, and we in the feminist movement should be more vigilant about this, because the young people are the main bearers of these traditional values, not their parents," she says.

Hana Grgić from Libela in Croatia talks about the need for vigilance for trends in the development of society.

"People might think that these values come from extreme, conservative organisations, but then 'suddenly' the Croatian representatives in the European Parliament voted against efforts designed to increase gender equality<sup>32</sup>," she says.

## Family above all

Political parties in the Balkans communicate a traditional view of the family in their party programmes. They underline that the family is the foundation of society and strengthening the role of the family is the way that society needs to go to protect morals and values. Some examples are listed below:

The Croatian HSP-AS believes that family is based on marriage, which is reserved for a man and a woman, and it is against other forms of cohabitation.

The Bosnian HDZ-BiH writes in its party programme that marriage is the best foundation for a shared responsibility between a mother and a father to take care of children, and it regards marriage as a life-long institution. "In light of the unacceptable demographic trend, as well as the fundamental human values, we

are in favour of the protection of motherhood.” They suggest, for example, that motherhood should be counted as a profession in the same way as work outside the family.<sup>33</sup> The problem with such proposals is that instead of enabling women to combine work and children, they are tied to the home even more. The proposal says nothing about the role of fathers.

Nada Tešanović is the Minister of Family, Youth and Sports in Republika Srpska. She is also vice president of the SNSD, the largest party in the entity. The SNSD highlights the importance of the family for a healthy society as a prioritised political issue. They are worried about what they call “the moral crisis” and want to reinstate “real” values. More specifically, they want to use economic resources to encourage families to have more children to address the low birth rate.

Ruža Tomašić, MEP and party leader of the Croatian HSP-AS, says this about the family:

“I regard it as the foundation of a democratic society. The family is a union based on marriage between a man and a woman, a group consisting of parents and their children. Families teach us the first lesson about love, freedom, tolerance, politeness, responsibility, religion and so on.”

She is also clear about that men and women’s roles and responsibilities within the family are different.

“I do not mean that fathers should not be involved in housework or take care of their children, but there are still biologically defined differences. First of all, the mother carries the child and thereby develops a special connection with it. Secondly, differences in mentality between women and men mean that children turn to their mothers and fathers for different things. So, children themselves distinguish between the genders and expect their parents to have different roles.”

When a citizens’ initiative called “In the Name of the Family” collected enough signatures in December 2013 to bring about the aforementioned referendum on a change in how marriage is defined in the Croatian constitution, it received active support from the Catholic Church. Information booths were set up outside churches all over Croatia to collect signatures, and

priests encouraged their congregations to vote for marriage to be reserved for a man and a woman. Nela Pamuković, from the Center for Women War Victims in Croatia, says that the Church is an influential actor and it is hard for activists to protest against it. Many are afraid of what their family and friends will say.

“The Church has a big influence over people’s daily lives, because they are responsible for a lot of ceremonies in society. This gives them more opportunity to exert pressure and manipulate people, like old people worrying about their funeral, for example. There are priests in the army, at our hospitals, in schools,” she says.

The HDZ party was a strong supporter of the marriage referendum.

“We are a Catholic party. We are in favour of the traditional family. We don’t judge anyone, but we think that marriage should be for men and women,” HDZ’s Marija Boban says about the referendum.

Conservative and religious business leaders in Croatia were also involved in the campaign, including the owner of the Konzum supermarket chain and Tisak kiosks. Customers in his shops were offered information about the proposal being advanced by “In the Name of the Family”.

The nationalist Dveri party, which is represented in the Serbian provincial parliament of Vojvodina, submitted a family declaration in November 2013 with proposals about how to strengthen the position of the family. One suggestion was to stop sex education in schools, since it “advocates homosexuality and directly damages the institution of the family.”<sup>34</sup> Dveri also works with “In the Name of the Family”.<sup>35</sup>

“When so much emphasis is placed on the family being a requirement for a healthy society, there is no room for those who do not wish to live in a classic family. And we can be sure that when politicians in Serbia talk about family and marriage, they only mean the traditional nuclear family. So the message

given to citizens is that having a family is the only normal thing to do, and that families with heterosexual couples are the only normal families,” says Snežana Jakovljević from Sandglass in Serbia.

## Misdirected efforts

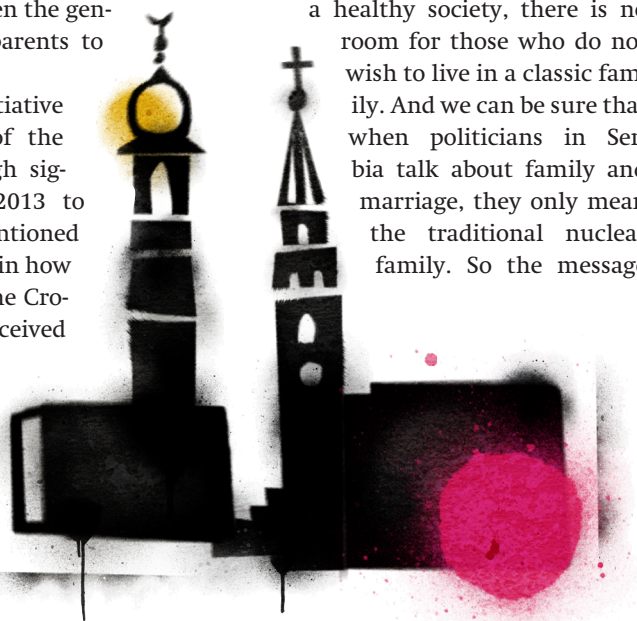
“Politicians’ interest in the demographic situation is based on ethnic politics. That is to say, they are worried that not ‘enough’ Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks are being born, as they base their legitimacy on bio-politics. They do not treat people in Bosnia-Herzegovina as citizens, but as members of ethnic biomasses. Their ideas and proposed ‘solutions’ are based on populism rather than well-developed and defined strategies,” says Professor Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović at the University of Eastern Sarajevo.

Even if politicians like to talk in broad terms about efforts to promote childbearing through financial support to parents and young couples, with allowances for large families and 100 percent parental benefits in some municipalities, women’s rights defenders think that these efforts are inadequate and misdirected.

Serbia, for example, places such a great financial burden on employers with respect to parental leave, that women of a childbearing age have difficulties in actually getting a job. Employers think that it is too expensive to employ them. For parental benefits to be paid out, employers still need to pay in social security contributions for employees while they are on leave, which can result in failures to pay or considerable delays.<sup>36</sup>

“I do not see any specific strategy from Serbian politicians about the population issue, only cheap populism. A country seriously concerned about this issue should, for example, address the issue of women’s health. Serbia has the highest rates of breast and cervical cancer in Europe, but there is a lack of preventative health care in the form of regular check-ups. There are huge problems on the labour market for women of childbearing age. At interviews they are asked whether they are planning to have children. And you often hear that parental benefit is paid out six months too late,” says Katarina Lončarević from the Belgrade Center for Women Studies in Serbia.

Being a parent in the Balkans also involves a major limitation in the freedom of movement as it is seldom possible to use public transport with a pushchair, and it is not socially accepted to breast-feed in public. When it is not possible to combine family and professional life,



## ● PARENTAL LEAVE

**Bosnia-Herzegovina:** 12 months. Between 50 and 100 % of the salary, depending on the respective entity and canton. The proportion of men who take parental leave is so small that it does not show in the statistics.

**Croatia:** 12 months. 100 % of the salary. Unemployed people get around €220/month. A one-off child allowance of around €300 is paid once the child is born. Men take 3 % of parental leave.

**Serbia:** 12 months. 80-100% of the salary depending on the municipality. Employers may not dismiss employees while they are on parental leave. The proportion of men who take parental leave is so small that it does not show in the statistics.<sup>41</sup>

women are advised to reduce or change their working hours, so that they can take care of their children.

“We should be going in the direction of giving women the chance to be self-employed and work from home, or work part-time. Having children means giving life and making the nation stronger,” says the Croatian HDZ party’s Marija Boban.

There are no statements to be found about greater participation from men potentially encouraging more women to have children. In Croatia men take just three (3) percent of parental leave.<sup>37</sup>

In Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the proportion of fathers who take parental leave is so low that it does not even show in the statistics.<sup>38</sup>

The labour market situation discriminates against expectant mothers even though there is legislation in place to prohibit this. In Croatia, not a single case of discrimination in relation to pregnancy has reached court, despite a large number of complaints.<sup>39</sup> The new labour laws being debated in spring 2014 in Croatia spell a further deterioration of the situation facing women.

“It is directly discriminatory and dangerous for women and women’s work. One of the main points in the law concerns flexible work, which leads us to more traditional roles for women that force them back into the home,” says Hana Grgić from Libela in Croatia.

For example, employers will now be more able to give women who have been on maternity leave a new, and worse, position. The law also suggests extending the maximum time for having an employee on a fixed-term contract from three to ten years. Most of the contract employees in Croatia today are women.<sup>40</sup> Hana Grgić sees that politicians are worried about the demographic development, but they present no effective pro-



posals to change the situation.

“What we get instead is lessons about morals,” she says.

Short-term and symbolic gestures are also popular among politicians. This may involve lump sums to families with several children, or payouts to help young couples who get married. These kind of ad hoc initiatives generate publicity and probably also popularity for the politician or the party. But there is no long-term effect worth speaking about.

## Violence against women

The family obsession is also worrying, because it can be an obstacle to the work on violence against women. For example, Republika Srpska’s law about violence in the home is so ambiguously formulated that social services often interpret it as meaning that their primary goal is to keep all families together – which means that they focus on mediating between victims and perpetrators, instead of developing measures to help affected women and children.

When political parties put all their focus on building up the family as an institution, even economically, women’s financial independence also suffers. Organisations that work with violence against women state that financial dependence is one of the factors that forces women to stay in violent relationships. Society’s stigmatising views of divorced

women as failures also plays a part.

That is why it is problematic when Nada Tešanović, the Minister of Family in Republika Srpska, says that “an important measure for preventing violence against women is to strengthen families financially” as it is precisely decisions like that, which can increase women’s dependency on their men. The World Health Organization (WHO) underlines the importance of efforts to support a family’s finances taking the gender equality perspective into consideration. Specific measures to strengthen women’s financial independence are needed.<sup>42</sup>

With gender-based violence, there is also a dangerous tendency to lay the blame on the women. For example, Ninoslav Girić, a member of parliament representing the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) said, during a debate about violence against women in the Serbian parliament in October 2013, that it was important not to forget that there are also cases of violence against men, and to investigate to what extent women provoke violence with their behaviour.<sup>43</sup>

Katarina Lončarević from the Belgrade Center for Women Studies in Serbia thinks that the same tendency to find fault with the victim can be seen in the media, and she believes the latter bear a big responsibility:

“One problem is how they present

violence against women, often in a very sensationalist way, and they tend to put some of the responsibility on the woman. We cannot disregard the media as a bearer of nationalist messages from politicians to the people.”

She is also critical of politicians’ prioritisations.

“They focus on the effects of the violence instead of the reasons for it. For example, that shelters are the solution, that’s all we hear. Nothing about how the violence will be reduced. We should talk about how traditional gender roles contribute to a normalisation of the violence,” says Katarina Lončarević.

Women’s rights defenders consider there to be a lack of deeper analysis of the problem surrounding men’s violence against women.

“Talking about zero tolerance for violence against women while all or almost all decision-making positions are still occupied by men is just counter-productive,” says Snežana Jakovljević from Sandglass in Serbia.

She believes there is a need for more far-reaching structural initiatives to change the balance of power in society if there is to be an end to the violence.

“Focusing so much on the family hinders the struggle against violence since violence is a result of the power imbalance. If women ‘return’ to the home and the family, this creates a greater imbalance, or that it remains at the same level at least,” she adds.

An illustrative example of national institutions’ lack of interest in the issue, is that Serbia’s Supreme Court said no to a request from women’s organisations to carry out a “One Billion Rising” event<sup>44</sup> outside the courthouse in February 2014. The campaign serves to draw attention to violence against women around the world on 14 February every year. The Supreme Court motivated its

decision by stating that the music during the planned event would disturb their work.

No, it is certainly true that the authorities do not want to be disturbed, and that is why they partially support women’s organisations work on violence against women. But as Katarina Lončarević says, the support they do provide goes to mitigate the consequences of the violence – helplines, shelters and psychological support for abused women. Those who raise their fists, the men, are invisible from the discussion and there are no specific efforts to minimise the violence.

Women’s activists speak of a normalisation of the violence in society as a result of the wars.<sup>45</sup>

“The boundaries of violence have shifted considerably during the war years and this has resulted in a lack of clarity when it comes to recognising violence today. Violence against women, minorities, immigrants, LGBTQ persons or people with other political views than the mainstream are a result of a fear for differences, which in turn is the reason for territorial and ethnic segregation in Bosnia-Herzegovina,” says Azra Čaušević, from Okvir in Sarajevo.

## Failure to implement legislation

Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia all have modern gender equality and anti-discrimination legislation.

It looks good on paper, but both women’s rights activists and the committee that monitors women’s rights for the UN see a different reality.

“The implementation of the laws is very problematic. I think it depends on the values in society and quite simply a lack of political will,” says Professor Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović at the University of Eastern Sarajevo.

She sees shortcomings in the municipal gender equality councils, both in terms of a lack of gender-specific statistics and of budgets having no gender perspective.

Nada Tešanović, Minister of Family in Republika Srpska, agrees that there is a large gap between legislation, policy documents and real life.

“Our society is no exception – there are different kinds of gender discrimination in every country. When we analyse why there is a gap, we see that the reason is ignorance and a lack of awareness of the rights that the laws provide, plus traditional and patriarchal structures. We need to work on changing people’s attitudes to men and women’s roles in society. This also applies within institutions, among public officials and within the private sector,” she says.

Helena Štimac Radin, Director of the Croatian government’s Gender Equality Office, notes that they are now working with half the budget they had in 2008. She believes that the economic crisis is to blame rather than a loss of interest in gender equality issues. But just to carry out the work for the EU Commission would require three new employees. She says that “there is a lot of reporting” and not so much time to be proactive.

“When you live here you get the feeling that there is no awareness of gender issues. Gender equality mechanisms? We never see them. I think that we are constantly being misled with explanations like ‘This country has much bigger problems’,” Hana Grgić from Libela in Croatia says on the subject of the Gender Equality Office.

Money is not the main problem at the Serbian Gender Equality Directorate – instead the staff state that they feel as though they have their hands tied because of where their office has been relocated to. During the last general election in 2013, it looked as though the new government might close the office completely at first.<sup>47</sup> Instead it was moved into the Ministry for Work and Social Policy. Employees speak of an extreme politicisation of the institution, that this reorganisation has made it difficult for them to act as an independent authority, and that politicians interfere in their work. The UN committee which monitors countries’ compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)<sup>48</sup>, has also commented on both the directorate’s placement and its understaffing as issues that need to be addressed.

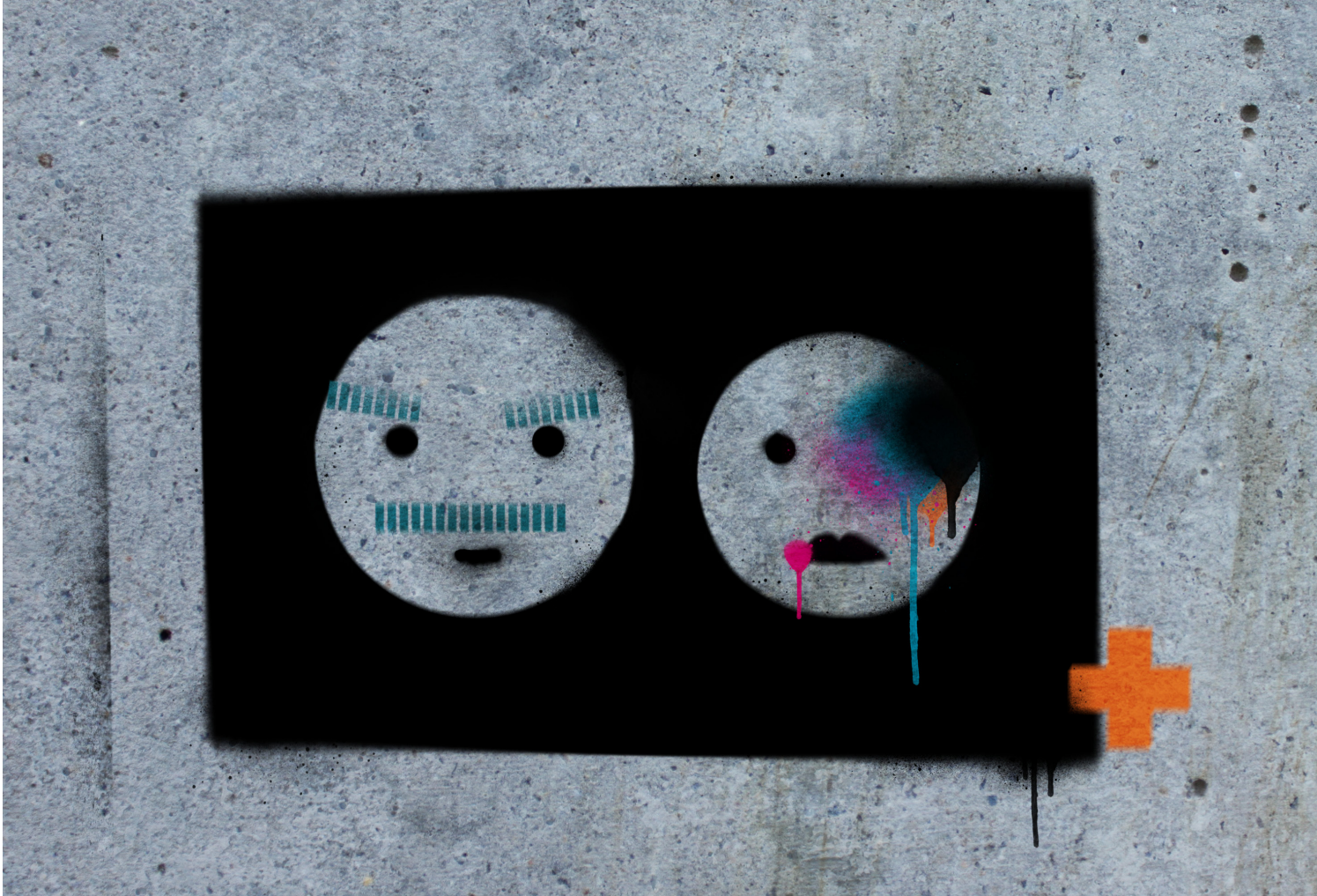
### ● VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

**Croatia:** 31% of women have repeatedly been subjected to violence and 44% have experienced violence at least once. There is no national helpline for female victims of violence. There are 19 shelters and 29 women’s centres in the country, as well as one centre for survivors of sexual violence.

**Serbia:** More than half (54%) of women in Serbia have been subjected to violence once during their lifetimes. 37.5% have experienced violence in the last 12 months (2010). There is a national helpline and there are 13 shelters, of which 11 are state-run. The state does not offer free legal assistance and the sentences for perpetrators are generally mild (most often fines, seldom prison).

**Bosnia-Herzegovina:** There are no national statistics. The legislative framework for violence against women is governed by several laws at national, entity and canton-level. Women subjected to violence are officially entitled to free legal assistance, but in practice this service is very limited. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has examined the judgments in 289 cases and is critical of the very mild sentences. Women’s organisations run two helplines, one in Republika Srpska and another in the Federation, as well as nine shelters. The latter are financed by international donors and funding from the municipality, canton or entity.<sup>46</sup>





“It’s a joke! The Gender Equality Office in Austria has 150 employees. We have five. It looks like we are going to lose EU funding because we do not have the capacity to administer it,” Mira Marjanović, who works at the Serbian Gender Equality Directorate, exclaims.

The staff wants the directorate to be independent from the authorities for them to be able to work more long-term.

“The commitments do not have any follow-ups, no budget. And there is still a lack of basic knowledge about what gender equality is in the national institutions,” says Natalija Mićunović, who is planning to leave her position as director soon, after six years at the directorate.

“Things are not good. I know that women’s rights organisations are going to be very vocal in their criticism of us,” she says.

And Katarina Lončarević from the Belgrade Center for Women Studies in Serbia is indeed disappointed in the Gender Equality Directorate.

“They are no help at all, and they have no contact with the feminist movement in Serbia. We regard each other as opponents all the time. They represent the government but lack power; they don’t even have power over their own budget. And it’s clear they are there because they have to be there, because of the EU; but it is a decorative function. Of course,

they can express themselves critically when you talk to them, but they do not follow up with action or by putting pressure on politicians,” she says.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina it is the Gender Equality Agency that is responsible for the government’s gender equality policy at a national level. There are also gender equality authorities at entity and municipal levels.

“We receive full support when we talk to parliamentarians. There is no specific party in Bosnia today that would say anything against gender equality. It’s only LGBT issues that provoke opposition,” says Kika Babić-Svetlin, advisor at the Gender Equality Agency.

In cooperation with various authorities, they have enjoyed great success with the armed forces and the police on the implementation of UN resolution 1325, which specifies the importance of women’s participation on issues concerning peace and security.<sup>49</sup>

“Our biggest challenge is that the need to protect the three constituent peoples is always prioritised; women’s representation always comes second. That’s what we live with every day,” says her colleague Adnan Kadribašić.

It is also in Bosnia-Herzegovina that the ethno-nationalist division Adnan Kadribašić mentions has most impact on the way civil society is able to operate.

“Our women’s movement is split into entities, as the country is split into entities. Although we all have breasts and wombs we are not able to engage in lobbying activities together for health care reform, for example, because there are eleven different laws,” says Stanojka Tešić from Forum Žena in Bratunac, referring to the Federation’s ten cantons and Republika Srpska, which all have their own legislation.

## Women in politics

Those who bought the *Press* newspaper in Banja Luka, Republika Srpska, in mid-September 2012 would have seen a large photo depicting more than 130 women standing as candidates in the forthcoming local elections. Readers were invited to vote for their favourites. But there was no information about party programmes or issues close to their heart. Instead it was a beauty pageant – Miss Municipal Politician.<sup>50</sup>

When women’s organisations protested against the initiative, the newspaper said that it cannot be held responsible for the fact that women are so invisible as political subjects and that they were doing the women a favour by raising their visibility in this way. In an interview with Radio Free Europe, the SNSD’s candidate, Gordana Lihović, said that she chose to participate as the chance of be-



ing seen in the media otherwise is very limited. “I thought that I would get the chance to say something about myself and that this would be spread in the media,” she said.<sup>51</sup>

“Where nationalist, totalitarian governments govern, which only recognise those who belong to their own group, women are always marginalised. Nationalism places women in traditional roles, and it is always men who are the leaders. And if women have a leading

position, they feel obliged to copy men’s style and behaviour. They have no power of their own. It is impossible to hear women’s voices. Women are allowed to do humanitarian work, take care of old people and children, and make sure that they are being good Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks and support the men.” This is how Stanojka Tešić, from the women’s rights organisation Forum Žena in Bosnia-Herzegovina, describes the situation for women in politics. The

traditional gender roles that the parties, the media and religious communities create certainly have repercussions, not least on women’s opportunities to participate in political contexts. Even though Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Her-

● **PROPORTION OF WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT**  
 Bosnia-Herzegovina: 21.4%  
 Croatia: 23.8%  
 Serbia: 33.2% (until elections in March 2014)<sup>54</sup>

zegovina all have electoral laws that include quota systems for the least represented sex, the reality is in fact more complicated. Until the last election, Serbia had been able to boast a relatively high proportion of women in parliament (33 percent). But if you look more closely at where these women are represented, it becomes clear that they are overrepresented in the committees that deal with stereotypically “soft” issues, and that there, for example, are no women in the defence committee. On the topic of women’s opportunities in politics, Sanda Rašković-Ivić, from Serbia’s Democratic Party (DSS), who has been a politician for many years, says that “had it not been for the quota system there would not even be 5 percent women in parliament”.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, women’s rights defenders report that even with women on party lists, additional initiatives are needed for them to be seen and heard during election campaigns. Parties only put men forward as speakers during meetings and campaign events they arrange.<sup>52</sup> It is not uncommon for women’s presence to be noted by stating that the parliament/government/committee has become “more beautiful to look at”.

Nermina Kapetanović, who is a member of the SDA’s board, a member of parliament and chairperson of the party’s women’s section, does not share this view. She believes that women do have a great deal to contribute when it comes to general political issues in Bosnia-Herzegovina. But it is clear that Nermina Kapetanović does not enjoy the full support of her party when it comes to women’s capabilities. When a network for female parliamentarians was formed in 2013, a male SDA parliamentarian made the following statement: “Gender is a completely incorrect basis for political organisation and can only do damage. Particularly among women who get brainwashed in these kinds of organisation to such an extent that they can no longer socialise normally with the rest of society.”<sup>53</sup>

On a local level, in Bratunac in Republika Srpska, women’s rights activist Stanojka Tešić explains how her organisation, Forum Žena, had trouble running a campaign to get people to vote for women in local elections held in 2012. The reason? Two people were standing as candidates for the post of mayor: a Bosnian Serb woman and a Bosniak man. Supporting women in politics could in this case have been interpreted as sup-

port for a specific ethnic group. Gender equality, it seems, can never come before ethnic divisions.

## “The Others”

For the fundamental nationalist idea of a special “we”, the people, to work, it also always needs to be clear who is not part of this “we”. Such mechanisms are further reinforced when there is a feeling of the nation being under threat, either territorially or from within. It becomes important to be and act patriotic, and creating a national consensus requires a shared identity. If the nation or the group is perceived to be in danger, most often in relation to another, the criteria for what can be included in the national or ethnic identity become pretty restrictive. To be able to say who is a true Bosniak, Croat or Serb, you also need to define who is not – “the Others”. In relation to Roma people, for example, it becomes important to point to all the ways in which they differ from the mainstream population. This distance is something that easily turns into racism and enables forced displacement from their homes and violence against them going unpunished.

The Roma people in the Balkans have been made so different that the discriminatory treatment of them, and their generally appalling living conditions, have become accepted. The idea has spread that “they” do not want to live in normal houses or apartments and that “they” are not interested in education and jobs other than collecting and recycling rubbish. And the discrimination of Roma women is twofold – strong patriarchal structures undermine women in both private and public life.

When Serbia recently became a recipient country for asylum-seekers from North Africa and the Middle East, residents protested against this foreign element by setting up barricades so that food and supplies could not reach the asylum centre. They also questioned whether they could send their children to school if they had to pass the centre. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the three majority groups are so protective of their position that they are incapable of changing the constitution even though it clearly discriminates against the Roma and Jewish minorities in the country.<sup>55</sup> And in Croatia it was easy to mobilise popular support to prevent the Serb minority being allowed to have Cyrillic signs put up on municipal buildings.

### ● ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LEGISLATION

Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia all have modern, general anti-discrimination legislation that has been adopted or updated in recent years (B-H and Serbia 2009, Croatia 2008).

The laws forbid discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, nationality, skin colour, disability, gender, sexual orientation, marital status and more. However, Bosnia-Herzegovina lack both age and disability categories, and Serbia failed to include the non-believer category.

The countries have independent ombudsmen offices who monitor the implementation of these laws.<sup>56</sup>

## Persecution of LGBTQ persons

A group that has become a clear symbol for “the Others” is the LGBTQ community – not least because they challenge the cherished heterosexual nuclear family. When it comes to LGBTQ rights, it is common to see pure hate propaganda and politicians perceive such political manoeuvring space, and receive so much public support, that they do not care about political correctness and EU monitoring.

In Serbia, the LGBTQ movement has tried to arrange Gay Pride parades every year since 2009, following a break after the 2001 parade was violently attacked. The government has forbidden the parade every year with reference to security issues. The exception was 2010, but as described earlier, this came at a high cost. Chaos filled the streets of central Belgrade when anti-gay protestors and police clashed. Ahead of attempts to stage a parade in 2013, the country’s Prime Minister, Ivica Dačić, responded in his usual frank way when asked whether he was planning to join the parade: “What do people expect? Should I be gay now so that everything is pro-European? Of course LGBT people should have the same rights as everyone else. But don’t come and tell me that it’s normal, because it’s not!”

This view was supported by the Serbian Orthodox Patriarch, who wrote a letter to Dačić calling for “the parade of shame” to be banned. As part of annual media spectacle that ensues during attempted plans to hold the parade, televised debates are held in which it is deemed acceptable to debate for and against LGBTQ people’s rights.

The situation is no better in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The 2008 Sarajevo Queer Festival had to be cancelled due to threats of violence. One of the cited rea-

sons for the aggressive opposition to the festival was that it coincided with Ramadan. But there was not just opposition from religious groups.

Azra Čaušević, from Okvir in Bosnia-Herzegovina, believes that LGBTQ issues challenge the strictly defined identities that are permissible in the country.

“The LGBTQ question therefore poses a threat as it goes against one-dimensional identities. It is so strong – masculinity, femininity, heterosexuality – it is almost impossible to get to express yourself if you are not heterosexual or part of the mainstream.”

In one study conducted by the CURE Foundation, which, among other things, works with young women, and the human rights organisation Sarajevo Open Center in Bosnia-Herzegovina in late 2013, 56.5 percent of respondents stated that homosexuality was a condition that needed to be cured.<sup>57</sup> Bakir Izetbegović, the Bosniak SDA’s current representative

in the Presidency, made similar statements about the Sarajevo Queer Festival in 2008. He spoke about a sexual “disorientation” and that he, as a believing Muslim, cannot consider it to be a good thing that homosexuality is presented to young people as a realistic alternative lifestyle. “It’s something that should only occur in private,” he said on Bosnian television.<sup>58</sup>

Rajko Vasić, a member of the Bosnian Serb party SNSD made similar comments: “I am not in favour of legalising rights such as same-sex marriage and the like. It’s unnatural, sick and deviant behaviour.”<sup>59</sup> Organization Q, the organiser of the Sarajevo Queer Festival, published a report after the event was cancelled stating that the aforementioned quote unleashed an “avalanche of hatred”. Organization Q no longer exists, but the queer activists at Okvir are among those who nowadays promote issues concerning LGBTQ people’s rights

in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Okvir’s office address is secret, with no sign to reveal their location.

“You learn to make risk assessments in every moment. That’s what makes us different from other activists. We can’t just go and hand out flyers,” Okvir’s Azra Čaušević says.

A law about hate crimes has been adopted in Republika Srpska, but not in the Federation. Human rights activists report that Bosnia-Herzegovina’s anti-discrimination law is also not being equally implemented in the two entities. The delayed hate crime legislation and the slow process in implementing the anti-discrimination law presents the country’s minority groups, such as bisexuals and homosexuals, with great difficulties.

“Most of them don’t even want to report threats and hate crimes. They are afraid of how the police will treat them, and that people will find out about their sexual orientation. So they come to us instead,” says Azra Čaušević.

Nevertheless, the Okvir organisation is taking small steps into the public sphere. They arranged a press conference at the International Coming Out Day on 11 October 2013. However, it had to be suspended when seven young men stormed



#### ● RIGHTS FOR HOMOSEXUALS

**Bosnia-Herzegovina:** Same-sex sexual relations were decriminalised in 1996 in the Federation and in 1998 in Republika Srpska. The constitution says nothing about marriage needing to be between a man and a woman, but this is stipulated in the family laws of both entities, so in practice, it is only possible for heterosexual couples to be married. The 2009 anti-discrimination laws prohibit discrimination on the grounds of gender and sexual orientation. Hate crimes based on sexual orientation are not defined in the laws.

**Croatia:** Same-sex sexual relations were decriminalised in 1977, and the age of consent has been the same as that for heterosexual relations since 1998. Discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation was forbidden in 2003. Marriage is defined by the constitution (2013) as a union between a man and a woman. Meanwhile a government proposal is under consideration to introduce registered partnerships. Adoption is possible for single people, but not same-sex couples.

**Serbia:** Same-sex sexual relations were decriminalised in 1994. Article 21 of the 2009 Anti-Discrimination Law prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. The constitution from 2006 defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman. There is no legal recognition of homosexual partnerships.<sup>62</sup>

into the venue calling the Okvir activists sick and perverted, and saying that God would burn them all. The police arrived too late to arrest any of them, and so far there have been no further investigations. The police also failed to protect the regional queer film festival that was held in Sarajevo in early February 2014. A dozen masked individuals, who, according to the organisers, came from the far-right Bosnian Movement for National Pride, stormed into the venue and attacked participants of a panel discussion with a bottle, among other things. Three persons suffered minor injuries.<sup>60</sup> The organisers had informed the police that morning that there had been increasing threats against the festival in social media. Yet the police were nowhere to be seen.

“Hatred against us is ignored. There is no one to remove the graffiti that says ‘kill the gays’ if we do not do it ourselves,” says Azra Čaušević.

During the 1990s, the Milošević regime in Serbia tried to discredit the opposition resistance by publicly declaring that the activists “are suspected of preferring members of their own sex”. And the same people, who thwarted attempts to hold the Gay Pride parade in Belgrade in 2001, then went on to break the windows of the Democratic Party’s offices, because they had extradited Milošević to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague. It all adds up. Those who deviate from the national consensus on permissible ways to be or think are punished. In a comment on an article about how it is to live as a homosexual in Republika Srpska’s largest city, Banja Luka, one reader stated: “Being homosexual here is exactly the same thing as not being a member of SNSD – you have all the rights on paper, but in reality they discriminate against you as often as they can.”<sup>61</sup>

How nationalism and homophobia are linked is also illustrated by an event that occurred during the 2013 marriage referendum in Croatia, described by Nela Pamuković, from the Center for Women War Victims. A number of women’s rights and LGBTQ organisations arranged a protest march the day before the referendum to encourage people to vote against the proposed constitutional amendment. When the activists painted banners prior to the march, some activists from Vukovar made one that said “Vukovar votes against”, written in Cyrillic. This was the time when the Serb

minority’s right to use the Cyrillic alphabet was being debated most intensely.

Protests from other organisations followed, urging the banner to be removed: “It’s too sensitive, don’t bring the Cyrillic alphabet into this now”. The police also tried to convince them not to use it. Nela Pamuković and the others responsible for the banner argued that it is possible to support both LGBTQ people and Serb minority rights simultaneously. They asked for the police’s request in writing, but of course they did not get one. The police stepped up security considerably due to the banner.

“There you have our security situation. That tension, it eats you up,” says Nela Pamuković.

### Activists under threat

During the late winter months of 2008, the atmosphere in Serbia was charged with tension. Following Kosovo’s declaration of independence in February, the polarisation was extreme – people were either Serb patriots or national traitors. A large “Kosovo is Serbia” demonstration in Belgrade on 21 February brought together around 150,000 people. Top politicians and the military were there, as were famous cultural and sports people. The message was clear – it was now time to agree to protect the country’s borders. The prime minister at that time, Vojislav Koštunica, stood on a stage in front of the parliament and asked: “Is there anyone out there who does not regard Kosovo to be Serbia?” And the film director Emir Kusturica stood on the same stage and called anyone who thought differently “mouse”.

One of the people to face the worst threats and hate campaigns was human rights activist Nataša Kandić, who then served as the Serbian Humanitarian Law Center’s executive director. She was invited as a guest of honour during the declaration of independence in Kosovo’s parliament, which resulted in politicians and the media in Serbia labelling her a “non-person”, a national traitor and the worst imaginable profanity, a “Croat whore”. She was neither deemed worthy of being a Serb nor a woman.

The Humanitarian Law Center’s office was vandalised that week. The socialist party SPS started a petition for Nataša Kandić to be charged with “acting against the constitution and endangering the nation’s security and integrity”. Its party leader, Ivica Dačić, who served

as Serbia’s prime minister from 2012 to 2014, suggested in parliament that organisations and parties that did not support the official Kosovo policy should be banned. The peace organisation Women in Black was one of them.

In Serbia, Women in Black, which works actively to get the own regime to take responsibility for the war crimes committed by Serb and Bosnian Serb armed forces and paramilitary groups during the wars, including the Srebrenica genocide, has not managed to attract broad public support. People talk about them as though they were a sect. When they hold silent protests in town squares dressed in black, people never spontaneously join them. Many people hate them, and regard them as anti-Serb traitors and they cannot understand why they would shame their own country and people, when so many wrongdoings have been committed by others.

It is impossible to list all the incidences of violence and threats that members of Women in Black have been subjected to during the organisation’s twenty-year history. They have come from parliament, fascist groups, government-affiliated media and passers-by during protests. The harassment also comes from the state in form of visits from the financial supervisory authority one day, to investigations on suspicion of running brothels another.

As recently as March 2014, a spokesperson for Serbia’s anti-terrorist police unit, used his personal Facebook page to call on his “brother hooligans and football supporters” to unite and use violence against “the cunts” from Women in Black. This was provoked by a vigil the organisation held to commemorate the fifteen-year anniversary of the NATO intervention in Kosovo, during which they called on the Serbian government to take responsibility for war crimes committed during the conflict.<sup>63</sup> During the Serbian television programme Utišak Nedelje (Impression of the Week) shown in January 2013, the president of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Sonja Biserko, faced threats of violence on live television from the leader of the far-right Naši 1389 movement. The threats were made against Biserko and all others who publicly declare that Kosovo is independent. The Serbian Minister of Justice, Nikola Selaković (SNS), was also sitting in the studio, and accused Sonja Biserko of having provoked the threats, and he pre-

sented a line of argumentation in which he equated human rights organisations with far-right extremist groups.<sup>64</sup>

In Zenica in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the human rights organisation Center for Legal Assistance explains how they have, for a number of years, been subjected to threats and verbal attacks from two municipal district chairmen, who have their offices in the same building as them. The organisation was forced to take down posters about violence against women, their electricity was cut off and two activists were physically attacked by one of the chairmen. Yet although the men were sentenced to pay fines, and although the Center for Legal Assistance reported the incidents to Zenica's mayor, the perpetrators were allowed to retain their posts.

Stanojka Tešić from Forum Žena in Republika Srpska, also tells of a threat-

ening work situation.

"Compared to other organisations we always need to apply for permission in advance to be allowed to conduct simple street actions. There are loads of police on site as soon as we do something, but we don't know whether it is to control the security situation or to control us. In February this year [2014], when the March 1st Coalition that works with war victims, veterans and refugees around Srebrenica, organised an action, the police suddenly stepped into our office and started interrogating us about our links to the coalition. Clearly this was an attempt to scare us!"

The Women in Black activist Slavica Stojanović describes yet another feeling of vulnerability, which comes from being excluded from the rest of society.

"The greatest danger to our security is the systematic questioning of our ideas.

My feelings of insecurity are about becoming isolated, of being turned into some kind of exception. And I feel like that more and more; more so now than before. In everyday life, the feeling of not belonging, that we do not understand each other," she says.

Professor Zlatiborka Popov-Momčinović at the University of Eastern Sarajevo in Bosnia-Herzegovina has studied the history of the women's movement in the country. She explains how women have organised themselves and protested against the growing nationalism from the late 1980s onwards.

"Women spoke up loudly against this rhetoric then. But the opposition did not get much attention in the media or in public," she says.

Katarina Lončarević from the Belgrade Center for Women Studies in Serbia does not see any improvements in how femi-

1. In Serbia, the common name for the area that is internationally known as Kosovo, is Kosovo and Metohija. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metohija>

2. "Ustavni sud Srbije zabranio 'Obraz' (Serbia's constitutional court banned 'Obraz')", Radio Free Europe (accessed 4 April 2014), <http://www.slobodnaevropa.org/content/zabranjen-obraz/24611790.html>

3. Stakic, 2013, Odnos Srbije prema ekstremno desničarskim organizacijama (Serbia's relation to extreme right organisations) Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, p. 8

4. "We need to talk about Mevlid – Vehabije and extremism in Bosnia and Serbia", Noel-Hill, TransConflict, (accessed 4 April 2014), <http://www.transconflict.com/2011/12/we-need-to-talk-about-mevlid-vehabije-and-extremism-in-bosnia-and-serbia-812/>

5. Obucina, 2012, Right-Wing Extremism in Croatia, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, p. o

6. "Croatia's HDZ shifts right in hunt for votes", Pavelic, Balkan Insight, (accessed 4 April 2014), <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/croatia-s-hdz-shifts-right-in-hunt-for-votes>

7. Slobodan Milošević was president of the country from 1989 until 2000, when he was toppled by a popular uprising. He was handed over to the ICTY in The Hague in 2001 and died in 2006, before they had a chance to prosecute him in the trial.

8. "In first census since war, Bosnia's 'Others' threaten ethnic order", Sito-Sucic, Reuters, (accessed 4 April 2014), <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/09/27/us-bosnia-census-idUSBRE98QoDT20130927>

9. *ibid.*

10. "Croatian, Bosnian HDZ parties urge Croats to take part in Bosnian census", Hina, Dalje, (accessed 4 April 2014), <http://dalje.com/en-croatia/croatian-bosnian-hdz-parties-urge-croats-to-take-part-in-bosnian-census/480009>

11. "Dodik: Državljanstvo RS je kapitalna stvar" (Dodik: Citizenship of RS is a capital thing), RTS, (accessed 4 April 2014), <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/11/Region/1408184/Dodik%3A+Državljanstvo+RS+je+kapitalna+a+stvar.html>

12. "Ny regering väntas i Kroatien" (New government expected in Croatia), Vrang, Sydsvenska Dagbladet, (accessed 4 April 2014), <http://www.sydsvenskan.se/varlden/ny-regering-vantas-i-kroatien/>, and "Cock a

doodle do?", TJ, The Economist, (accessed 4 April 2014), <http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproach-2011/11/croatia>

13. "Croatia Elections 2011: Live Blog", Balkan Insight, (accessed 4 April 2014), <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/croatia-elections-2011-live-blog>

14. "Divided Bosnians vote after nationalist campaign", BBC, (accessed 4 April 2014), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11460478>

15. Nezavisne Novine 30 September 2010, in Mirsad, 2012, Bosnian General Elections of 2010 and the post-election crisis, p. 77 16. *ibid.*, p. 71

17. "Bosnia Elections 2010: Profile", Balkan Insight, (accessed 4 April 2014), <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/bosnia-election-profile>

18. "Savez za Hrvatsku u Sibeniku: Moli, radi, rodi" (Alliance for Croatia in Sibenik: Pray, work, give birth), Podrug, TRIS Neovisni Novinarski Portal, (accessed 4 April 2014), <http://tris.com.hr/2014/03/savez-za-hrvatsku-u-sibeniku-moli-radi-roditi/>

19. Vojvodic, 2012, Gender Analysis in Ethnic Conflict – Causes and Consequences in the case of Yugoslavia, p. 4

20. Cockburn 1998:161 in Vojvodic, 2012, Gender Analysis in Ethnic Conflict – Causes and Consequences in the case of Yugoslavia, p. 8

21. Vojvodic, 2012, Gender Analysis in Ethnic Conflict – Causes and Consequences in the case of Yugoslavia, p. 8

22. Official website of HSP-AS, programme declaration: <http://www.hsp-ante-starcevic.hr/index.php/stranka/opce-programske-smjernice>

23. Official website of r SDA, programme declaration: <http://www.sda.ba/dokumentaSDA/PROGRAMSKA%20DEKLARACIJA.pdf>, section 10

24. Official website of r DSS, programme declaration – section for demographic politics: <http://dss.rs/demografiska-politika/>

25. In vitro fertilisation – technology that fertilises eggs outside the body. Used to combat infertility.

26. Results of the referendum about the so-called Estrela Report, 22 October 2013, <http://www.lgbt-ep.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/RCV-Vote-on-referral-back-to-FEMM.pdf>

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“The media decides whose voices are to be heard, and this almost never includes feminists,” she says.

Snežana Jakovljević from Sandglass in Serbia highlights the importance of always ensuring that people know what they, as activists, are doing. Openness and information create a kind of security.

“It prevents opponents from physically harming you,” she says.

Azra Čaušević, from Okvir in Bosnia-Herzegovina, resonates along the same lines. She believes that it is important to continuously work against marginalisation and being put in a box.

“I don’t want to be turned into a ghetto. So we always insist on sharing our experiences. What happens to us should concern everyone – the women’s movement, civil society, the public.”

During and after the wars in the Bal-

kans, national consensus was accorded utmost importance. Whoever deviated from the tight constraints of what defined being a Bosniak, Croat or Serb, was labelled an enemy of the state or traitor and accused of espionage with links to any countries with which relations were strained.

Women’s rights defenders who are actively opposed to the wars, militarism and nationalism, are still labelled witches, whores or lesbians (a profanity in this context). Serbian activists are in particularly extreme cases called “Croat whores” to underline just how much they have betrayed the motherland, or called “Ustaše”, the name of the Croatian fascist movement that was active during the Second World War.

According to the same logic, prominent Croatian feminists have been ac-

cused of being instruments for Serbian racist politics, and for “raping Croatia”.<sup>65</sup>

The hatred that women’s rights defenders attract, just by organising themselves and demanding to be taken seriously, is grounded in the fact that they challenge existing power hierarchies in society. It becomes a national security threat when they work for women’s rights.<sup>66</sup> Things get even more serious when they also demand to be included in decisions about the country’s constitution, as in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The most sensitive question of all, each ethnic group’s story about the wars, which largely concerns their own suffering, is a provocative subject. It becomes particularly precarious when women from different ethnic groups join forces, since they then highlight an alternative, shared identity that differentiates itself from the ethnic one. ■

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The fight against groups deemed to be harmful to the nation is the glue that holds Europe's nationalist parties together.

Regardless of whether this threat is said to be Muslims (the Sweden Democrats, France's National Front and the Freedom Party of Austria), Roma people and Jews (Hungary's Jobbik) or LGBTQ persons (basically

all of them), the message is that the own people need to be protected from these "dangerous forces".

Getting the nation's women to have more children is a popular solution among the parties. But when it comes to policies for creating equal rights and opportunities regardless of gender, there is no interest whatsoever.

**Text: Annika Hamrud**

# NATIONALISM IN – EQUALITY OUT

## Hungary and Jobbik

In the first twenty years after communism, Hungary was alternately ruled by liberal and socialist governments. Since 2010, Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance, has been in power in the country, with a two-thirds majority in the parliament. Fidesz was previously a liberal party, but it has undergone considerable change. Now, it seeks to reinstate national pride and change the view of history. It can no longer be described as liberal, but strongly nationalistic. Streets are being renamed; heads of cultural institutions are being replaced – all in the name of the nation.<sup>1</sup>

Fidesz has also instituted multiple governmental reforms. With its two-thirds majority, the party has introduced a new constitution, which has already been subject to a number of amendments in the last couple of years.<sup>2</sup>

According to the constitution, expressions of opinion that are regarded as damaging to the Hungarian state can now be banned, and political campaigns may only be conducted through national media outlets.

Constitutional amendments have also involved changes to the way the family is viewed. The constitution now defines the family as only including heterosexual nuclear families with children, which excludes same-sex marriage. Moreover, abortion is now included in the constitution, stating that life begins at conception. There is no prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of age or sexual orientation in the constitution. This means that adverse treatment based on these criteria is not explicitly

un-constitutional, even though Hungary has approved the EU anti-discrimination directive.<sup>3</sup>

While a constitution should be superior to national legislation, the abortion law has not been amended, for example, and in practice the right to abortion has not been limited. The same applies to the discrimination laws that still remain.

Hungary has drawn strong criticism from the European Parliament for its constitutional amendments and for undermining basic rights by connecting them to obligations, as well as from the Venice Commission, which is the Council of Europe's advisory body on constitutional matters.

The country has also taken a surprising decision to allow non-resident ethnic Hungarians to vote in its general elections. Hungary has a majority population that speaks Hungarian and can trace its Hungarian roots back over many centuries. Yet ethnic Hungarians do not only live in the state of Hungary, but in neighbouring countries too. So it is now enough if people can prove that they are ethnically Hungarian to get the right to vote in Hungary.

In spite of these developments, Fidesz is not described as a far-right party – mainly because there are many smaller extremist parties in Hungary that also use violence. One of them has grown and managed to get into parliament. The Movement for a Better Hungary, or Jobbik as it is more commonly known, is a nationalist party that has consecutively advanced in the last three elections, most recently in April 2014 when it

managed to secure 20.5 percent of votes.

Jobbik was founded in 2003 by a group of young male conservative university students as a reaction against the economic liberalisation of Hungary. The party voices strong opposition to global capitalism. Jobbik wants the economy to be under state control and there is little respect for the parliamentary system.

Jobbik describes itself as a principled, conservative, radical patriotic and Christian party. The aim, they say, is to defend Hungarian values and interests, and the party claims to confront all attempts to undermine the nation as the basis for human community.<sup>4</sup>

The party is anti-Roma and anti-Semitic. It has a strong leader in Gábor Vona, who also founded a parallel organisation, the Hungarian Guard, a paramilitary group that declared itself to be a kind of gendarmerie. After it was banned in 2009, the New Hungarian Guard (Új Magyar Gárda) was founded, which is essentially the same organisation. Members dress in uniforms reminiscent of those worn by the Arrow Cross Party, a fascist militia that collaborated with the Nazis during the Second World War, killing tens of thousands of Jews.<sup>5</sup> In 2011, Gábor Vona turned up in parliament wearing a Garda uniform, stating that this represented a protest against the deteriorating security situation in the country.<sup>6</sup>

The men from the New Hungarian Guard organise marches through Roma neighbourhoods. Some of the paramilitaries have "Csendőrség" (gendarmerie) printed on their backs.<sup>7</sup> This was the





The Hungarian anti-Semitic party, Jobbik, says that it wants to protect Hungarian values.

Photo: ATTILA KISBENEDEK/TT

name of the district militia that played an important part in the deportation of Jews during the Second World War. Jobbik's deputy leader, Murányi Levente, looks favourably upon Csendörség.

"Csendörség were useful and effective. In the old days they took people who had committed crimes to the police station and beat them up. This was more effective against crime than long drawn-out legal processes and such methods are needed again."<sup>8</sup>

Last year, a Jobbik member of parliament demanded an investigation to determine which members of parliament are Jewish.<sup>9</sup> However, there are no signs that Jobbik will follow the anti-Muslim path that several European far-right populist parties have pursued.

Family is the party's key focus area. It is concerned about declining numbers of ethnic Hungarians and lower levels of morality. In its party programme, Jobbik describes a demographic crisis with a shrinking population, a low birth rate and many Hungarians leaving the country.

With a clearly conservative family policy, the party wants to encourage more

ethnic Hungarians to have children. The heterosexual nuclear family should be placed in the centre. Special family legislation should support both stay-at-home and working mothers. Taxes on families should also be lowered for each additional child they have, which is expected to encourage women to stay at home with their children and look after their parents when they get old.

In 2012, the party put together a legislative proposal demanding prison sentences for "sexually deviant behaviour" and for people who openly spread what they call "homosexual propaganda".<sup>10</sup>

Jobbik believes that abortion should only be allowed for medical reasons or in cases of rape or incest.

The family policy is a logical extension of the way that Jobbik regards Hungary and Hungarians. Even if the party does not speak about races, it clearly distinguishes different people, and believes that ethnic Hungarians should enjoy special treatment in Hungary. Women should be mothers – their role is to bear and raise new Hungarians. The tax policy, in combination with a shift in values,

is designed to persuade women to stay at home and have many children.<sup>11</sup>

There are very few female Jobbik politicians. However, this is by no means unusual in Hungarian politics. Only nine percent of members in the Hungarian parliament are women.

Jobbik shows how hard it can be for far-right parties to work together in Europe. At present, the party does not belong to any particular group in the European Parliament. After the 2005 EU elections there was a far-right group called "Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty" (ITS). However, the ITS group dissolved just a few months after its formation, when an Italian member insulted a Romanian colleague. The joint programme that the group put together prior to its dissolution stated that member parties, among other things, agreed on the protection of "traditional values".<sup>12</sup>

Despite the problems, Jobbik continued to seek collaborations. In 2009, the Alliance of European National Movements (AENM) was created on Jobbik's initiative, yet not all of the five parties in the alliance were represented in the European Parliament. The parties were

Jobbik, France's National Front, Italy's Tricolour Flame, Sweden's National Democrats and Belgium's National Front.<sup>13</sup> The five parties agreed on a nine-point programme, including areas such as "traditional values" to strengthen families and solve the demographic deficit, as well as demands for Europe to be protected against religious, political and economic imperialism.<sup>14</sup>

But in 2011, the alliance's largest member, France's National Front, left the group when its party leader, Marine Le Pen, joined the European Alliance for Freedom (EAF),<sup>15</sup> which also counts Kent Ekeröth from the Sweden Democrats as one of its members.

Together with Geert Wilders' Dutch Party for Freedom, Marine Le Pen has recently made clear that she cannot imagine collaborating with the anti-Semitic Jobbik party. Jobbik has retaliated by claiming that they now have nothing in common with the National Front except criticism of the EU. It says that the National Front and other parties have become liberal. Hungary does not have many refugee immigrants and there are few Muslims. Moreover, Jobbik has little in common with the other parties' anti-immigration and anti-Muslim stance.<sup>16</sup>

In Hungarian politics, Jobbik's position on issues concerning women and gender equality is clear. However, a closer inspection of how the party votes in the European Parliament makes it more difficult to identify its party position. In fact, Jobbik has on several occasions voted in favour of measures that have a positive impact on women's rights. On proposals about gender equality in boardrooms and equal wages, the party has voted in line with the European People's Party, a parliamentary group that includes Sweden's Christian Democrats and Moderate Party. This is very different to how parties such as the French Na-

tional Front, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) and the Danish People's Party have voted.

When it comes to strengthening immigrant women's rights, however, Jobbik always votes against. The party also never supports any rights whatsoever for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer persons (LGBTQ).<sup>17</sup>

The fact that Jobbik neither votes against greater rights for women, nor votes as other anti-European parties tend to do, may be because of Krisztina Morvai, a non-attached MEP who was elected on Jobbik's party list.

Although Krisztina Morvai is not a member of Jobbik, she is also the party's candidate for the Hungarian presidential elections.<sup>18</sup> Morvai is a lawyer and has taught at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and represented Hungary in the UN Commission on the Status of Women, which monitors countries' compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Her main research areas include abortion, victims of crime, rights of people with HIV, child abuse and sexual exploitation, prostitution, discrimination and men's violence against women. She has also worked for the Council of Europe for human rights. Paradoxically, she also has an openly anti-Semitic and pro-Hungarian nationalist stance.

## Austria and the FPÖ

An enthusiastic public waves red and white flags, screaming as though it were the final of the Eurovision Song Contest. There is quite an atmosphere at meetings of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ). Its party leader, Heinz-Christian Strache, commonly known as HC, is on tour with the Austrian John Otti Band. It is playing the party's latest signature song "Liebe ist der Weg" (Love is the Way), a love song about HC Strache himself.<sup>19</sup>

Protestors have gathered outside the festival area where the party's mass meeting is being held. They have their own chants that label HC Strache and his party as Nazis.<sup>20</sup>

People wanting to hear HC Strache's message can also turn to Youtube. Sporting a leather jacket, earphones and dark sunglasses, he raps along to a kind of oompah-reggae with techno influences.<sup>21</sup> He complains about the government and Brussels, about the Greens and the Social Democrats, shouting: "Stand up if you support Heinz-Christian Strache".

Austria is a Catholic and conservative country. Women tend to stay at home to

take care of the family. In recent years, more women have started working, often on a part-time basis as they also have to take care of the home.<sup>22</sup> Austrians retire earlier than in many other EU countries and birth rates are low. The school system is outdated and based on mothers staying at home to cook lunch and help with homework in the afternoon.

The Freedom Party (FPÖ) was founded in 1956. Friedrich Peter, a former member of the German Nazi Party (NSDAP) and volunteer in the Nazi Waffen-SS security forces, was party leader of the FPÖ between 1958 and 1978.

Jörg Haider became party leader in 1986 and this marked the beginning of the FPÖ's successes. He quickly became governor of the Austrian state of Carinthia, but was forced to step down in 1991 after making comments in favour of the Nazi labour market policy.<sup>23</sup>

In the 1999 parliamentary elections, the FPÖ secured 27 percent of votes and the conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) invited the FPÖ to form a coalition government. This attracted a great deal of attention in Europe and led to EU sanctions against Austria, because it was felt that the Austrian government was legitimising far-right extremism in Europe. The FPÖ's time in government was not a success and by 2002 it had lost a lot of support, securing just 10 percent of votes in the parliamentary elections.<sup>24</sup>

In 2005, the party grappled with infighting, and Jörg Haider, who had previously lost his position as party leader, formed the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ). The BZÖ party went on to take over the FPÖ's position as coalition partner after the next elections.

Haider died in a car crash in autumn 2008. After his death it was revealed that he had lived a double life with a male party colleague, while also being married. And this in spite of the fact that he was politically strongly opposed to all political improvements for homosexuals.

Haider had been succeeded in his former party by the charismatic Heinz-Christian Strache. Strache has transformed the FPÖ. He wants the party to be perceived as Israel-friendly and instead focuses on issuing warnings about Muslim immigration. Many commentators believe that the party has adopted an even more extremist rhetoric while he has been party leader.

The rebranding of the party from having had links to the Nazis to becoming an anti-immigration and, in particular, anti-Muslim party (the same rebranding that France's National Front and the

### ● JOBBIK (Hungary)

**Gábor Vona**, who trained to be a history teacher, co-founded Jobbik in 2003. In 2007, he became party leader at the age of 28. That same year, he founded Magyar Gárda – the Hungarian Guard – a paramilitary organisation that uses the same symbols as the Arrow Cross Party, which helped the Nazis to kill Jews during the Second World War. After the Hungarian Guard was outlawed in 2009, the New Hungarian Guard was established.

In the 2009 European elections, Jobbik secured 14% of votes, which gave the party three seats in the European Parliament. Jobbik is also expected to do well in the 2014 European elections.



HC Strache is party leader of the Austrian FPÖ.

Photo: RONALD ZAK/TT

Sweden Democrats are working on) has not always worked well for the FPÖ. The anti-Semitic characteristics and a reluctance to completely distance themselves from Nazism lives on.<sup>25</sup> Strache has frequently attracted attention with his anti-Semitism and for paying tribute to Nazi war veterans.

Strache's key priorities ahead of Austrian elections in 2013 were to ban mosques, minarets and Muslim women's headscarves. He also wanted to ban preaching in languages other than German. The party has handed out computer games in which players can shoot at mosques, minarets and prayer leaders. The ruling coalition including the social democratic and conservative parties maintained a small majority in the elections, but support for these previously entirely dominant parties is still at record lows. Electoral participation has also reached rock bottom. The FPÖ won more than 20 percent of votes, while the BZÖ suffered serious losses.<sup>26</sup>

Women and family issues do not really feature in Strache's rhetoric. Using his Islamophobia as a starting point, most often directed at the Turkish minority in

the country, the FPÖ claims to support women's rights in election campaigns. This is essentially about highlighting what the party believes could happen if the ongoing immigration of Turks is not stopped. The FPÖ warns that Austria is undergoing "Islamisation" and that this will have negative repercussions for Austrian women.<sup>27</sup>

In a handbook, the FPÖ has described the Muslim threat as being demographic. It states that Muslim women have too many children and that Austrian Christian women's children will be converted to Islam unless immigration is stopped. The FPÖ also claims that half of all children in Austria will be Muslims by 2050.

To solve the demographic problem that the FPÖ believes Austria is facing, the party proposes an active family policy for Austrians. The party programme details that the family is a partnership between a man and a woman and their children; a natural core that holds together a well-functioning society and makes it sustainable. The argumentation is classically nationalist. Men and women should assume different positions within the nation.<sup>28</sup>

#### ● FPÖ (Austria)

The Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) is led by Heinz-Christian Strache, known as HC Strache.

The party is strongly opposed to immigration, even though HC Strache has made favourable comments about Serbia, the origin of many immigrants in Austria. The FPÖ has strong links to Belgium's Vlaams Belang, as well as the Danish People's Party and the Sweden Democrats. Links to France's National Front have recently been strengthened.

The FPÖ is the country's third largest party with 40 of the 183 seats in the National Council. According to opinion polls, the FPÖ is expected to do well in the 2014 European elections.

The FPÖ wants the state funding that now goes to childcare to go directly to families so that one parent can take care of the children until they start school. Considering the fact that so many Austrian women are housewives already, this proposal would probably result in there being even fewer working women. The fact that the party does not want to expand pre-school care is partly due to its libertarian ideology about as little state-involvement as possible, as well as its nationalistic views about traditional family formation.

Abortion is permitted up to and including week twelve in Austria, after which special permission is required. However, the reality in large parts of the country is that it is difficult to get an abortion, as doctors may refuse to perform the procedure citing the freedom of conscience. Abortions are not paid for by the public health system.

The FPÖ has its own way of interpreting the laws and believes that abortions are actually illegal, but that it is not punishable to undergo an abortion. The FPÖ wants public resources used to pay for abortions to instead be used to encourage women to have children and keep them.<sup>29</sup>

In the European Parliament, the FPÖ often tends to vote in line with France's National Front. These two parties do not support any proposals that seek to strengthen women's or LGBTQ persons' rights. They vote against, abstain or refrain from voting.<sup>30</sup>

### France and the National Front

In some respects, France is a conservative country, where parties from both sides of the political spectrum can be seen to exhibit traits of protectionism. At the same time, there are clear differences between the right- and left-wing

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The National Front's leader, Marine Le Pen, likes to compare herself to France's patron saint, Joan of Arc.

Photo: JOEL SAGET/TT

parties. To understand French politics, it must not be forgotten that the country was one of the world's greatest colonial powers, counting countries such as Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Vietnam as part of its empire.

At first, the National Front (Front National) was an electoral alliance that brought together the splintered far right in France. Jean-Marie Le Pen, a veteran of the Algerian War, founded the National Front party in 1972. The party leadership included Nazi sympathisers who had worked in the Vichy regime, which ruled the country during the German occupation in the Second World War, or the Nazi Waffen-SS security forces. The party had long included both those who wanted to work in a parliamentary way and those who wanted to see a violent takeover of power. However, with time the National Front became increasingly parliamentary and, moreover, completely personified by its leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen.

The party has been against immigration ever since it was founded. Immigrants have been blamed for high crime and unemployment rates, for the spread of AIDS and for undermining French culture. The National Front wants free market forces to reign in France, but is protectionist, anti-globalisation and

anti-American at the same time. The party's nationalist ideology results in a strong emphasis on tradition and it is considered important for children to be raised to be good French citizens.

Jean-Marie Le Pen has repeatedly been convicted of making statements in which he denies and downplays the Holocaust. He has also said that "races are not equal".<sup>31</sup>

The National Front is well-established, but has never been accepted by the other parties in the country that has been guided by its famous motto, "Freedom, Equality, Brotherhood" for more than 200 years. It was not until Jean-Marie Le Pen's daughter, Marine Le Pen, took over the party leadership that the party started talking about the "French Republic", which means that it accepts the ideas from the French Revolution. For many years, the National Front has enjoyed support of around 15 percent of the electorate and sometimes more than 20 percent in local elections.

Marine Le Pen is said to have eliminated anti-Semitism from the party. Those who stand for election for the National Front and have previously been Holocaust deniers, for example, must ensure that they will not express such views again.

To some extent, Marine Le Pen has been able to repackage the party message outwardly, but her new focus, on Muslims, has seen her being charged with incitement to hatred, having equated Islamic prayer time on the French streets with the Nazi occupation during the Second World War.

The French majority electoral system with single-member constituencies disadvantages the National Front, which has not managed to get any seats in the National Assembly in most elections. Marine Le Pen was close to winning in her constituency in the 2012 elections, but instead it was her niece, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, who managed to secure one of the party's two seats in the current National Assembly.

The National Front is a nationalist party that wants French women to have more French children. In its party programme, the party emphasises that the family should be a key pillar of society. The family should be protected, valued and preserved. When the National Front speaks about family, it means the heterosexual nuclear family, with a mother working in the home taking care of the children, and a father who has a paying job. The parents must also have French roots.

### ● NATIONAL FRONT (France)

In 2011, the party's founder, Jean-Marie Le Pen, handed over the leadership to his daughter, Marine Le Pen.

The National Front secured 13.6% of votes in the first round of elections to the National Assembly in 2012, but then only won two of the single-member constituencies. In the presidential elections that same year, Marine Le Pen won 17.9% of votes. The party made considerable progress in the last local elections, even though it did not stand in many of the municipalities.

According to opinion polls ahead of the 2014 European elections, the National Front is the leading French party. Based on these figures, the party is due to obtain 20 seats (of 766), compared to the 3 seats it currently has.

The National Front is worried that there are too few children being born in the country. In its party programme, it states that the birth rate is 2.02 children per woman in total, and 1.8 children per “French” woman. The National Front considers people to be French if they have been French for many generations or earned the right to be citizens in the country.

The party criticises the country's latest governments for pursuing policies that discourage rather than encourage families to have children. The criticism is directed at the partial removal of joint taxation for couples and an increased retirement age, which the National Front believes has hit French women with more than three children in particular. Joint taxation means that it makes more financial sense for families that only one spouse works while the other stays at home, while separate taxation encourages both parents to work.

The National Front also wants to introduce childcare allowance to get one parent to stay at home with the children. This stands in stark contrast to the free public pre-schools that many French children attend these days. The childcare allowance would be 80 percent of the minimum wage for three years from the day that the second child is born, and for four years for the third child. Parents opting for childcare allowance would have a special legal and social status, which includes the right to vocational training for the stay-at-home parent when the children start school. The proposal also includes special social protection, for those who have not engaged in paid work, for example, and women who have raised at least three children would have the right to retire earlier.

Child benefit is also designed to en-

courage French families to have more children. The National Front believes that the contribution should only be paid out to families where at least one of the parents is French. Families where both parents have a foreign background are not eligible. The contribution would also be increased, but then parents are expected to take care of the children. If they neglect their responsibilities, some or all of the contribution should be withdrawn based on a court decision. In its party programme, the National Front speaks of general moral decay in society. They believe that the nuclear family has been destroyed and that there is a lack of clear boundaries.

Ahead of the French elections in 2012, a heated debate ensued about so-called “abortions of convenience”. It was claimed that women use abortion as a method of contraception and the National Front urged that these should not be financed using public money.

The debate began after a live televised broadcast by the party's vice president, Louis Aliot, who is married to Marine Le Pen. During subsequent discussions, he explained that when abortion is used instead of contraception, it should not be funded by the general public. He also spoke about the need for elderly care versus the costs of performing abortions.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the criticism, Marine Le Pen defends the French law that gives women the right to free abortion until week 22. However, her father Jean-Marie Le Pen, has expressed strong support for the proposed limitations to the abortion laws in Spain.<sup>33</sup>

The effect of the party's dual position means that the National Front is able to attract female voters who do not want abortion to be banned, without alienating those opposed to abortion.

In spring 2013, France passed a law that gives same-sex couples the right to marry and adopt children. Marine Le Pen believes that the fight against the law must continue until it is scrapped. She describes homosexuals' rights as part of the gender ideas that – like “so many other bad things” – come from the United States.<sup>34</sup> Homosexuals have the right to a private life, but it should not be “manifested”, she says. And she is not alone in thinking this. Last year, there were major protest marches across Paris against same-sex marriage, and this year the same groups have reacted strongly to rumours that school children will be learning about gender and gender equality. Many more demonstrations with up

to one million participants have been held. Apart from homosexual marriage, protestors are also opposed to abortion, gender theory and paternity leave – often as a reaction to the policies of socialist French President François Hollande. Many National Front party members have joined in the protests, but the party has not participated officially as it has not been welcome. Nevertheless, Marine Le Pen has been able to ride the conservative protest wave. In local elections in March 2014, the party made considerable progress, winning mayoral elections in eleven municipalities.

Marine Le Pen has a vision of being able to influence EU policies by forming a strong nationalist group in the European Parliament with parties from many different countries.<sup>35</sup> If this becomes a reality, it can be expected, based on the proposed members' party programmes, that the group will be an opponent to reforms for women's and LGBTQ persons' rights. Until now, the National Front has been very negative to all proposals that seek to strengthen rights for LGBTQ persons, as well as questions concerning sex education and free abortion.<sup>36</sup>

## The Netherlands and the Party for Freedom

Like France, the Netherlands is a country that has a colonial past. Indonesia, its largest colony that gained independence from the Netherlands in 1945, has the largest Muslim population in the world and there is a large Indonesian minority group in the Netherlands.

In the 1980s and 1990s, there were a number of far-right extremist parties in the Netherlands. Back then, the political boundaries were clear-cut. The established parties did not want to have anything to do with nationalist or far-right populist parties. They were linked to the domestic Nazi traitors from during the Second World War.

A whole new chapter for the Netherlands began with the sociology professor and columnist Pim Fortuyn. He was openly gay and argued against multiculturalism, immigration and Islam. Having attracted a great deal of media attention, in February 2002 he formed a new political party called the Pim Fortuyn List (PFL). His popularity quickly grew during that spring's election campaign period.

When he was assassinated a short time before the elections, the party attracted even more attention, which subsequently led to the PFL getting the second most votes and becoming part of the coalition government. But without its leader, it

did not take long before the party fell apart. This also caused the government to collapse and new elections were held. The PFL ended up in opposition and then faded away.

Meanwhile, there were two parliamentarians who attracted attention for their criticism of Islam, namely Geert Wilders and Ayaan Hirsi Ali from the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD). Ayaan Hirsi Ali became known for her strong efforts against genital mutilation and forced marriage. She made several controversial statements about Islam and made a short film directed by Theo van Gogh, which many Muslims around the world found offensive. Just a few months after it premiered, Theo van Gogh was assassinated and Ayaan Hirsi Ali received death threats. The murderer was a radical Islamist. Ayaan Hirsi Ali has since left the Netherlands and now lives in the United States.

At the same time, Geert Wilders faced battles with his party, in particular with respect to Turkey's EU membership application. He was politically alienated in parliament and formed the Party for Freedom (PVV) in 2006.<sup>37</sup>

That same year, he won 15.9 percent of votes and nine seats in the Senate. However, the party only has one member, namely Geert Wilders. He selects people to sit in parliament as representatives of the PVV, but none of them are permitted

to become members of his party.

Geert Wilders also became internationally renowned through a film, *Fitna*, which was published on the Internet in 2008. The film is 17 minutes long and purports that Islam promotes terrorism, anti-Semitism, violence against women, as well as violence against and the subjugation of non-believers and homosexuals.<sup>38</sup>

*Fitna* provoked a great deal of controversy in the Muslim world and Dutch companies were boycotted. Wilders was charged for incitement to hatred in the Netherlands. When the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) invited him to the United Kingdom in 2008, he was denied entry to the country by the British authorities, as they thought he was promoting hatred. In 2010, UKIP invited him again – this time he was allowed to enter and showed his film in the House of Lords.<sup>39</sup> In 2011, Geert Wilders was also acquitted of the charge for incitement to hatred in the Netherlands.

Wilders is fundamentally libertarian. He wants the state to have as little to do with the country's economy and people's lives as possible. As a libertarian he claims to fight for freedom of speech, which he believes should be maximised. At the same time, he is running a campaign to get the *Qur'an* banned in the Netherlands. He equates Islam with Nazism and believes that since *Mein Kampf* is banned, so should the *Qur'an*.

#### ● PVV (Netherlands)

The Party for Freedom (PVV) was founded by Geert Wilders, and he has basically been running the party single-handedly ever since as its sole party member.

The PVV's party programme says nothing about family policies or gender equality issues. The following sentence summarises its LGBTQ policy: "Homosexuals should be protected from Islam".

Although the PVV has been a front-runner in opinion polls ahead of the 2014 European elections, support for Geert Wilders is waning.

Wilders focuses on two issues: anti-Islam and anti-EU. He has a clear agenda that builds on the Eurabia theory<sup>40</sup> and claims that there is an Islamic plan to take over Europe, so as to be able to implement sharia law. The only mention of women in the PVV's party programme is that the party wants to introduce a tax to be paid by women wearing headscarves – the so-called "kopvoddentax" or "head rag tax".<sup>41</sup>

During negotiations that were held to get Wilders to support the former Dutch government, he called for a ban on burqas and niqabs, as well as on dual citizenship. Coalition partners agreed, but the government later collapsed and the proposals were never implemented.

The Netherlands has long been perceived as a country with a high tolerance of minorities, and is often compared to

"No thanks" to the EU and Islam, says Geert Wilders, party leader of the Dutch PVV. Photo: JENNY ELIASSON/EXPO



Denmark and Sweden, which are also tolerant countries according to the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).<sup>42</sup> Research shows that the Netherlands has, in general, not become a less tolerant country. But unlike in most countries, the level of tolerance of LGBTQ persons is higher than that of immigrants. Geert Wilders describes it as though the Dutch have stopped being tolerant to those who are intolerant.<sup>43</sup> Other commentators identify a development where the formerly strong boundary between far-right and other parties is no longer maintained. Wilders and the PVV have instead managed to influence Dutch politics. One clear consequence is the more restrictive immigration policy.

In various studies, the Netherlands is seen to have the Europe's best levels of gender equality, with respect to education, political participation, less violence against women, and the lowest rates of teenage pregnancies and teenage abortions.

At the same time, many Dutch women are still not financially independent. Right into the twenty-first century, a large proportion of them have been home with their children, and this is still the case in many conservative parts of the country. Various initiatives have meant that the employment rate for women has improved, but they largely tend to work part-time, which makes them dependent on their husbands' income. Childcare is expensive, however mothers tend to continue to work only part-time even when their children start school.<sup>44</sup>

It is against the background of a relatively gender-equal Netherlands that Geert Wilders presents the threat of Islam. This is how proposals that limit Muslim women's freedom in practice, can be packaged as being in defence of liberal values.

Geert Wilders is now enjoying a career that takes him all over the world as an anti-Muslim agitator. He travels all the time and often speaks at conferences and events. In 2012, he was in Sweden, having been invited by the anti-Islamic Free Press Association (Tryckfrihetssällskapet) in Malmö in southern Sweden. The visit led to violent protests and prompted a major police presence.

Wilders is a great admirer of Israel, a country he visits frequently. He has previously distanced himself from the National Front's former leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, and the FPÖ's former leader, Jörg Haider, calling them both fascists.

"I'm very afraid of being linked with the wrong rightist fascist groups," Wilders

said in an interview with the *The Guardian* in 2008.<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, he has now joined forces with these parties. Together with the National Front's Marine Le Pen, Wilders announced in November 2013 that he is seeking to form a new group in the European Parliament. The National Front and the PVV have invited the Austrian FPÖ, the Belgian Vlaams Belang and the Sweden Democrats to join the group.<sup>46</sup> For Wilders, the main reason for being part of the group is to further his party's anti-EU agenda.

Based on the PVV's current actions in the European Parliament, the party does not support any proposals that seek to strengthen the rights of women or LGBTQ persons. This excludes initiatives against genital mutilation and other issues that the party can link to anti-Islamism. The difference between the PVV on the one hand, and the FPÖ and the National Front on the other, is that the PVV more often abstains from voting, to show its opposition to the fact that the European Parliament even addresses such issues.<sup>47</sup> In the Dutch Senate, the party always votes in line with the conservatives and never in favour of progressive proposals for women's rights.

Wilders' position as a "truth-teller" in the Netherlands has recently suffered a blow. During a meeting after local elections at the end of March 2014, Geert Wilders asked the audience: "Do you want more or fewer Moroccans in this city and in this country?" The sympathisers then shouted "Fewer, fewer, fewer". The Muslims in the Netherlands whom Wilders and his supporters have a problem with are not those with Indonesian roots, but first and second-generation immigrants from Morocco and Turkey.<sup>48</sup>

Cheerleading chants about throwing out Moroccans turned out to be the limit for several of the newly elected PVV representatives in municipal councils. Many of them resigned, as did PVV members of the Senate. At police stations there have been lines of people wanting to report Wilders for racism and opinion polls reveal that he has lost a great deal of support.

## Sweden and the Sweden Democrats

The Swedish far right, like many of Europe's other hibernating fascists and neo-Nazis, had trouble winning support for their ideas in the first few decades after the Second World War. Those groups who did try led a languishing existence. At the end of the 1970s, the racist move-

ment, *Bevara Sverige Svenskt* (BSS, "Keep Sweden Swedish"), was launched as an attempt to find a new strategy for the marginalised far right. The group's only focus was to save the Swedish people from "destruction". Only "ethnically related people from culturally related countries" would be allowed into the country. Adoptions of foreign children would be banned and the abortion policy would "be more restrictive".<sup>49</sup>

Family policy was the central focus for BSS. Together with a radically changed immigration policy, it was cited as the key to the survival of the nation of Sweden.

Inspired by developments in Europe, including the formation of the National Front in France, the dream of founding their own party grew. In the late 1980s, BSS joined forces with the Stockholm branch of the Progress Party (Framstegspartiet) to form the Sweden Party (Sverigepartiet). On paper, it was a logical symbiosis. The Progress Party had previously called for limited immigration as well as "justice for men, and women back to the stove".<sup>50</sup> But in practice, the collaboration turned out not to be particularly successful. The Sweden Party was disbanded and the BSS fraction broke away to form the Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna) in 1988.

The Sweden Democrats won their first municipal seats in the 1991 elections, but were forced to acknowledge that another party, New Democracy (Ny Demokrati), had been more successful in attracting voters from the major wave of dissatisfaction that swept across the country. New Democracy managed to get into the Swedish parliament in 1991, but lost all of its seats in the 1994 general election, after the party's parliamentary group had been pulled apart by internal conflict. Meanwhile, the Sweden Democrats were still close with the neo-Nazi movement that it had partially sprung from.

It would take another 16 years until a new party managed to get into the Swedish parliament based on promises of limited immigration. But in the 2010 elections, the Sweden Democrats won 5.7 percent of votes and 20 seats in the parliament. All the evidence suggests that they will remain in the Swedish parliament after the national elections in autumn 2014, and that they will win at least one seat in the European Parliament in May 2014.

The Sweden Democrats have always been and continue to be a nationalist party with a conservative family policy.



The party's core issues include radically reducing immigration, counteracting multiculturalism, protecting the nuclear family and nowadays also counteracting all expressions of Islam in society. The party has successfully repackaged its message, but this does not mean that the basic ideas have changed.

In the party programme that was adopted in 1994, the Sweden Democrats stated that “the family remains the fundamental unit around which our society is built”. The party wanted to introduce parental benefits that would enable parents to be at home more during the first three years. At the same time the party opposed legislation about paternity leave. An increased birth rate would be achieved by improving the financial situation for couples to have more children. It was necessary to create the financial possibilities of working in the home, as the party formulated it. This policy would in practice have increasingly kept women out of the workforce.<sup>51</sup>

A new policy programme was adopted at the Sweden Democrats' party congress in 2011. Having previously only referred to itself as nationalistic, the party was now said to be social conservative.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, it described itself as being

part of the “political middle”. In reality, the Sweden Democrats most often vote in line with the centre-right Alliance. However, this excludes immigration, its key issue, as the Alliance and the Green Party (Miljöpartiet) have agreed to pursue a common policy on this.

The Sweden Democrats have exceptionally conservative values in comparison to all other parties in the Swedish parliament, with a firmly entrenched nationalist perspective. Women should reproduce for the survival of the people, and the policy programme has a very conservative attitude to questions concerning families, LGBTQ persons and abortion.


The Sweden Democrats are the only party in the Swedish parliament seeking to lower the limit for free abortions to twelve weeks.<sup>53</sup> This line of argumentation is primarily advanced by the party's former gender equality spokesperson, Mattias Karlsson, together with the parliamentarian Julia Kronlid. She has previously voted for the Christian Democrats (Kristdemokraterna), but has said she chose the Sweden Democrats because they have a clearer position against abortion and marriage for same-sex couples.<sup>54</sup>

Like other nationalist parties, the Swe-

den Democrats state that they want to strengthen families. Yet one of the party's priority issues concerns limiting immigration for family members of people who have received a Swedish residence permit or have become Swedish citizens, thus preventing families from being reunited. They seek to drastically reduce immigration from “culturally divergent countries”, i.e. the Middle East and Africa, as they claim that this immigration, more than any other, threatens Sweden's cultural homogeneity. This same idea was once advanced by BSS, though they also included “ethnicity”. Different words, same effect.

The Sweden Democrats' view of gender equality is somewhat different to that of its European cousins. According to several senior representatives of the party, gender equality is something typically Swedish that is an intrinsic part of Swedish culture. Linus Bylund, a Swedish parliamentary candidate and the party leader Jimmie Åkesson's chief of staff, believes that “we” have gender equality within us from the Viking Era.<sup>55</sup> This rhetoric disregards the fact that today's gender equality is the result of political processes that have often been initiated or driven by the women's movement. However, it makes it possible for the





Mixed audience when the leader of the Sweden Democrats party, Jimmie Åkesson, held a speech in Almedalen 2013. Photo: EXPO

#### ● SWEDEN DEMOCRATS

The Sweden Democrats party grew slowly throughout the 2000s and first won seats in the Swedish parliament in 2010. Jimmie Åkesson became a party member in 1995, chairman of its youth league in 2000 and party leader in 2005. In addition to Jimmie Åkesson, the informal party leadership is said to include Richard Jomshof, Matthias Karlsson and Björn Söder.

The Sweden Democrats enjoy widespread support and are represented in most Swedish municipalities, though with many empty seats.

The party ranks highly in opinion polls and is likely to win seats in the European Parliament in the May 2014 elections.

done in schools, for example.<sup>57</sup> However, they also state that feminism and gender studies are developments that show that “things have gone too far”.

Margareta Larsson, member of parliament for the Sweden Democrats, has previously voted for the Christian Democrats. In her blog she writes that the “gender war” has had “a terrible and devastating effect on women”. She says that Sweden has gotten a false gender equality that has resulted in “a comprehensive slaughter of long-lasting and healthy relationships”.<sup>58</sup> She also believes that the fight for women’s position in society has erased the nation’s foundation, the family.

Within the party’s youth league, Sweden Democrats Youth (SDU), it is more common to speak harshly about feminism than in the parent party. While senior representatives speak about feminists dealing with “non-issues” such as the word “hen” (gender-neutral pronoun) and gender-neutral toilets,<sup>59</sup> the youth league calls feminism a “disgusting ideology”.<sup>60</sup> The SDU’s chairman, Gustaf Kasselstrand, openly promulgates the importance of anti-feminism, while the deputy chairman, William Hahne, sticks to tweeting about what he thinks of women who have underarm hair, calling it “feminist nonsense”.<sup>61</sup> In other contexts, he has openly expressed that the problem with Sweden and the Swedish defence is that it has been “feminised”.<sup>62</sup>

This is not what is said in the policy programme – there women have a more elevated position as being important for the continuation of the nation. The Sweden Democrats regard the family as the most important and fundamental social unit. The best living situation for all children is said to be with one mother and one father, and the party wants to double the childcare allowance from

3.000 SEK to 6.000 SEK. The aim is to encourage parents to stay at home and look after the children instead of sending them to pre-school. Research shows that it is largely women who claim the childcare allowance. The contribution is not pension-qualifying and studies show that users run a greater risk of having severe difficulties when trying to re-enter the workforce later on.<sup>63</sup>

The Sweden Democrats have previously motioned for voluntary joint taxation in parliament,<sup>64</sup> which involves a couple’s income being combined and taxed as one. This is now largely an issue being advanced by the SDU, which claims that it would benefit women. Joint taxation was abolished in Sweden in 1971, based on the argument that it presented an obstacle for people, especially women, to join the labour market.

Jimmie Åkesson became party leader of the Sweden Democrats in 2005 and there is now no one to threaten his position within the party. The party is organised as a classic Swedish associative democracy. It is represented in many of Sweden’s municipalities and counties, although many of the seats are empty. At the same time, the party is ruled top-down and, unlike other parties, it has only presented one parliamentary list for the whole country ahead of the 2014 elections.

Since the Sweden Democrats entered the Swedish parliament in 2010, the party has managed to seriously establish itself in Swedish politics. However, it still suffers from the same problem as many other similar parties: the difficulty of attracting female voters. One problem is that the Sweden Democrats have been plagued by scandals that give the impression that the party is full of laddish, misogynistic jargon. For example, various female politicians and public officials have resigned after being subjected to sexual harassment.<sup>65</sup>

In the summer of 2010, the former chairman of the youth league and future financial spokesperson in the parliament, Erik Almqvist, was out on a pub crawl with the future member of the parliament’s Committee on Justice, Kent Ekeröth. During the early hours of the morning, they ended up in a fight and Erik Almqvist called a woman a “little whore”. This sparked a lot of media pressure, and he chose to resign from the parliament.<sup>66</sup>

In recent years, the party leadership has tried to change the image of it being a male-dominated party. One of the

Sweden Democrats to embrace the Swedish self-image about being a gender-equal country, while pushing back reforms that seek to even out the differences between men and women’s life conditions in practice. Instead of regarding feminism as a way to achieve gender equality, it is looked upon as a threat.

Even though the Sweden Democrats are in certain respects positive to Swedish gender equality, this does not hinder the party from emphasising differences between the sexes. The Sweden Democrats’ party programme highlights “the inherent differences between men and women”. These differences go beyond what can be perceived with the naked eye, writes the party, but the different characteristics are said to complement each other. When the head of the Sweden Democrats’ women’s association (SD-Kvinnor) in an interview with Sveriges Radio (Sweden’s national radio) was asked to explain what these differences are, she was unable to answer.<sup>56</sup>

According to the policy programme, gender equality formally means that no one should be treated differently. Unlike the other European nationalist parties, the Sweden Democrats praise a great deal of the gender equality work being

demands being made by the Sweden Democrats ahead of the 2014 elections is the end of split shifts in the care sector, to attract female members of the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO).<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, the top candidate for the European elections is a woman: Kristina Winberg, a care assistant from Jönköping. She is an anonymous figure in the party, but is being given the chance to represent the Sweden Democrats in Brussels, thus opening the door to an electoral target group that has previously been hard to reach. However, at the very top of the party, there is a glaring absence of women, although several women, mostly representatives from its women's asso-

ciation, do speak on its behalf.

The Sweden Democrats have been motioning in the parliament for grants for parties' women's associations to be abolished.<sup>68</sup> At the same time, they themselves applied to get money for a women's association, which is said only to have been created to enable them to get the funding.<sup>69</sup> The Sweden Democrats' women's association is principally opposed to feminism. Other than calling for the abolition of the International Women's Day that is celebrated on 8 March every year, the other key issue for them is the work against honour violence, which they link to cultures that are not "Swedish".<sup>70</sup>

According to the ideology of the Swe-

den Democrats, violence against women is generally primarily a question of immigration. During the electoral campaign in 2010, the party ran a campaign against rape<sup>71</sup>, which was reminiscent of a campaign from the neo-Nazi Party of the Swedes. For these parties, rape is something that foreign men do to "Swedish" women. Women are thereby not just portrayed as caring mothers, but also as victims, who need to be protected from "evil foreigners". Muslim women have another role in the rhetoric of the Sweden Democrats – either as victims of an honour culture or as a threat.

The parliamentarian Kent Ekeröth promotes the question about what he calls

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the “Muslim demography”. He believes that Muslims have lots of children, as a conscious strategy to Islamise Sweden.<sup>72</sup> That is why it is important to the Sweden Democrats to prevent Muslim immigration in particular. This line of thinking can also be seen in the party’s campaign films. Prior to the 2010 elections, the party made a film featuring women in burqas pushing buggies, competing with an elderly “Swedish” woman with a walking frame.<sup>73</sup>

The Sweden Democrats’ leadership is struggling with supporters across the country who express racist views. However, strongly anti-feminist statements

are also common. The chairman of the Sweden Democrats in Södertälje, Tommy Hansson, who is also on the parliamentary list and has been editor-in-chief of the party magazine *Kuriren*, tweets about feminists as “semi-old bags who haven’t managed to get themselves a bloke”.<sup>74</sup> When the Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to a woman, he said that this was because of a quota system.

Tommy Hansson also blogs about the Stockholm Pride Festival every year. He describes it as a stunt, by what he calls the “homosexlobby”.<sup>75</sup> In addition to anti-feminism, the Sweden Democrats have previously driven a hard line against LGBTQ persons. However, in recent years

the party has refined its rhetoric. Prior to elections in 2010, sexual minority groups’ rights were used as an argument against immigration, for example, in an attempt to play off the two groups against each other and attract voters among the LGBTQ community.<sup>76</sup> It is increasingly seldom that the Sweden Democrats speak negatively about homosexuals and they believe that transsexuals should have the right to correct their gender identity.

However, the party is opposed to marriage, insemination and adoption for same-sex couples and states that homosexuality is a private matter that does not need to be “manifested”.<sup>77</sup>

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# SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

This study, *Patriotism and patriarchy*, describes how strong nationalism affects women's human rights and women's role in society. It looks at the situation in the Western Balkans, a region with a long history of strong nationalist political parties, and also takes a closer look at nationalist parties in five European countries.

Nationalism in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia is clearly rooted in the wars of the 1990s, not least with respect to the fact that differences between various ethnic groups are highlighted, as well as the need to protect and strengthen the own group.

## Need for more children

Even though nationalist views are nowadays seldom openly featured in party programmes in the Western Balkans, the story of their own people's greatness plays an important role in politics. Within the nationalist movement, women's sexuality is linked to the nation, and reproduction is women's primary task. This is particularly noticeable in the parties' focus on increasing low birth rates for the populations to grow stronger. Women are encouraged to have more children, and parties in all three countries have proposed financial stimulus packages for families, such as a supplement for multiple children and giving motherhood a professional status. The proposals are always based on the nationalist view of what a family is – a traditional nuclear family consisting of a heterosexual couple, where the woman is supposed to be a stay-at-home mother who takes care of the children and the household.

Women are discriminated against on the labour market. In Serbia, the demands on employers concerning payments for their employees parental leave are so high that it has become a hinder for employment for women of a fertile age. And in Croatia, bosses can assign women who have been on parental leave to new and less desirable positions. Still, there is no desire among nationalist parties to remedy such incongruities, as a way to reach

their goal of getting women to want to have more children.

The parties are also not interested in initiatives to get men to take more responsibility for the home and the family. When women find it hard to combine professional and home life, politicians instead present another solution. The Croatian HDZ party, for example, suggests that women should cut back on their hours or start their own companies, to enable them to work from home and take care of their children at the same time.

The fact that demography is such an important political issue is one of the reasons why the right to abortion is constantly being debated. Many of the parties are careful with officially calling for limited abortion rights, but individual party representatives express criticism of abortion and also push this matter in the European Parliament. Moreover, the issue has engaged religious communities and shows that these have major political influence. For example, the Serbian Orthodox Church called abortion "child murder" as recently as 2013.

## Women in the home

The view of families and women as being responsible for reproduction is a recurrent topic among other nationalist parties in Europe as well. For example, the Sweden Democrats are, as the only party in the Swedish parliament, calling for the limit for free abortion to be lowered to twelve weeks. The party is against parental leave earmarked as "father's months", but wants to double the childcare allowance. This contribution is largely claimed by women, which negatively impacts their pension and negatively affects their chances of getting a job later on.

The Hungarian party Jobbik wants to successively reduce taxes for families for each new child, as a measure to encourage women to stay at home with their children (and also take care of their ageing parents). Like the Sweden Democrats,

France's National Front is focusing on childcare allowance, and wants to give women who have raised at least three children the right to an earlier pension. And in Austria, the FPÖ wants national childcare funding to go directly to families instead, so that one parent can stay at home and look after the children until they start school. A large proportion of mothers in Austria are housewives already and such a proposal would certainly result in there being even fewer working women.

Proposals based on more women staying at home with their children is not just problematic as it reinforces traditional gender roles, but because they, by extension, also mean that women become financially dependent on their husbands. In such cases, it is hard for women to claim the right to have a life of their own, or being able to leave relationships if they are subjected to violence or threats.

## Anti-immigration rhetoric

Most of the parties in the study combine family initiatives with anti-immigration rhetoric, in particular against Muslim immigrants. The National Front, for example, only wants child benefits to be paid to families in which at least one parent is "French", i.e. does not have foreign heritage. And when the Sweden Democrats say they want to strengthen the family, certain families are excluded, as they also want to drastically limit immigration for family members of people who have received a Swedish residence permit or have become Swedish citizens.

Even with respect to questions concerning gender equality, the political parties largely consider these to be linked to immigrants and their alleged repression of women. The only time the Dutch Party of Freedom mentions women in its programme is when it talks about the party wanting to introduce a tax on women who wear headscarves. The FPÖ believes that Austria is being "Islamised", which it believes will have a negative impact on women's rights. The Sweden Democrats' women's association cited honour violence as one the most serious gender

equality issues in Sweden today, which they attribute to other cultures than the “Swedish”. None of the parties in the study have policies to actively contribute to a more gender-equal society.

### LGBTQ persons persecuted

In addition to immigrants, lesbian, gay, transgender and queer persons (LGBTQ) are also regarded as the nationalistic “the Others” in the Europe of today. These people are persecuted and threatened, and their human rights are systematically undermined. In Hungary, Jobbik proposed prison sentences in 2012 for “sexual deviant behaviour” and the spread of what the party calls “homosexual propaganda”. It was not adopted, but the Hungarian constitution now prohibits same-sex marriage, as is the case in Croatia following a referendum last year.

The Sweden Democrats are also opposed to marriage, insemination and adoption for non-heterosexuals. In France, the National Front is calling for the 2013 law that gave same-sex couples the right to marry and adopt to be scrapped.

Living in a way that is different from the traditional nuclear family is not acceptable to nationalist parties and they do not think that people who do so should be given the same possibilities to have families.

In the Balkans, women’s rights organisations that work against nationalism and militarism face opposition and vilification by political representatives, since they are regarded as a threat to national cohesion and identity.

Women who challenge traditional gender roles are also a popular target for nationalist parties. There are many examples of representatives of the Sweden Democrats making disparaging statements about feminists, as for example, “semi-old bags who haven’t managed to get themselves a bloke”, or the use of femininity as something negative when the problem with Sweden and the Swedish defence is said to be that they have been “feminised”.

### Looking towards the EU

Many of Europe’s nationalist parties are not in government in their respective

countries. When they have trouble advancing political issues on a national basis, many of them instead look to the EU. One example of this is when the Croatian HSP-AS spoke out against abortion in the European Parliament. This provoked a major reaction in the Croatian media and the party was able to use the publicity to raise the issue on home ground too.

Another way is to join forces with other nationalists in the fight against immigrants, LGBTQ persons and women’s rights. Many of these parties already vote the same on these issues in the European Parliament. However, if they form a group, like France’s National Front and the Dutch Party of Freedom have announced, they will be able to have an even greater impact.

Such developments mean that core human rights are at risk of being undermined – and the gender equality successes that the women’s movement has achieved during its many years of struggle risk being thwarted. ■

## IMPACT OF NATIONALISM ON GENDER EQUALITY

- Gender equality issues are never prioritised by the nationalist parties. They are often excluded from their policies.
- Several of the parties believe that there are biological differences between men and women, meaning that it is natural for women to engage in care-taking tasks, for example, both at home and in working life.
- The nuclear family is regarded as the foundation of society, which means that it is difficult to live in non-traditional family relations. LGBTQ persons often face discrimination in nationalist parties’ policies. They are denied the right to marriage, insemination and adoption, for example.
- Political initiatives for the family are generally designed in a way that envisage women staying at home with the children, while men have a paying job. Traditional gender roles are thereby reinforced.
- Family policies that make women financially dependent on men make it hard for women to leave violent relationships.
- As demography and child-bearing are important to nationalist parties, there is often a strong desire to limit the abortion right for women. Some parties want to ban abortion completely.
- LGBTQ persons and women’s rights defenders who challenge traditional gender roles face opposition, harassment and ridicule.
- In the European Parliament, the nationalist parties often vote in favour of conservative proposals, and they hardly ever support initiatives to strengthen the rights of women or LGBTQ persons.

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The Expo Foundation dates back to 1995, when the Expo magazine was launched to assess and monitor the growing far-right movement. The magazine is still published regularly, and the Expo Foundation is engaged in education, advocacy and research in order to curb organised racism and the influence that its fundamental beliefs have on society.

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation began as an appeal against the mass rapes and other horrific abuse suffered by women during the wars in the Balkans in the early 1990s. Today, Kvinna till Kvinna strengthens women in conflict-affected regions, by providing support to 130 women's organisations based in the Middle East, South Caucasus, Africa and the Balkans.