



CEE Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

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BURNING ISSUE

The outcome of European Parliament elections foreshadows an uncertain future of EU

The May 2019 elections for the European Parliament had a record high turnout of over 50% across the EU. This is the largest number of Europeans to have turned up at the ballot box in two decades. It shows that citizens recognise the importance of the EU in shaping their daily lives.

The biggest winner might be European democracy and the Parliament's democratic legitimacy. Turnout surged from 42.6 percent five years ago to 50.5 percent, the first increase in turnout in the Parliament's 40-year history despite the increasing power of the institution in European Union policymaking. The fact that Europe was one of the dominant issues in the elections meant they were more than just a series of votes on domestic issues. They were truly European. But the outcome will deepen uncertainty about the future direction of the EU.

Although the proportion of progressive forces in the newly elected European Parliament has somewhat decreased compared to the previous mandate, it remains a considerable force. Any majority coalition will need to include at least two or more groups of progressive players to be stable. Progressive actors will therefore continue playing a key role in promoting and defending the EU's fundamental values.

In Hungary and Poland, voters turned out in record numbers to endorse the “illiberal democracy” championed by those countries’ leaders. The results highlight the firm grip of these euroskeptic, authoritarian regimes on voters, driven by appeals to nationalism and aided by the increasingly limited space for opposition, independent media, and civil society.

In both countries, the elections dealt serious blows to opposition efforts to find messages and build coalitions that would allow them to challenge the ruling parties. In Poland, the newly formed European Coalition, a pro-EU opposition umbrella group, won 37 percent of the vote, signaling that it will likely need to retool its leadership and messaging if it hopes to compete with PiS in national elections in the fall.

REGIONAL UPDATES

Kyrgyzstan Women Fight to End Bride Kidnapping

Kyrgyzstan toughened laws against bride kidnapping in 2013, making it punishable by up to 10 years in prison, according to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which said it was a myth that the practice was ever part of the culture.

In a handful of cases the kidnappings are consensual, said Kleinbach, especially in poorer communities where the practice was akin to eloping to save costs of a ceremony or hefty dowry.

A UNDP spokeswoman said data was scant on the number of women abducted each year because many women did not report the crime through fear but they estimate about 14 percent of women younger than 24 are still married through some form of coercion.

“They don’t want to report, this is the issue,” Umutai Dauletova, gender coordinator at the UNDP in Kyrgyzstan, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Dauletova said most cases did not make it to court as women retracted their statements, often under pressure from female family members, fearing public shaming for disobedience or no longer being a virgin.

“This is the phenomenon of women suppressing other women,” she said.

This is just a part of a [longer article](#).

FROM ASTRA MEMBERS

A survey on Barriers of Accessing Safe Abortion Services for Women of Reproductive Age

On May 15, Association HERA XXI held the presentation of the survey on Barriers of Accessing Safe Abortion Services for Women of Reproductive Age. The Survey is unprecedented in Georgia

as gathering life stories of 91 women gave researchers an opportunity to identify not only socio-economic barriers but also to highlight the emotional and psychological obstacles that women face.

Professionals from medical field, representatives of International and Non-governmental organizations, Public Defender's Office and the Parliament of Georgia attended the presentation. The event was finalized with follow-up discussion, during which representatives of the different sectors had the opportunity to exchange thoughts and comments.

In parallel with the presentation, youth, and persons interested in sexual and reproductive health and rights conducted mini-campaign in order to raise awareness of broader public about sexual and reproductive health and rights. During the campaign they disseminated important messages such as Sexual Education for All, Safe Abortion Services for All Women, I Have a Right to Make an Informed Choice, Family Planning Services for All and Sexual and Reproductive Health is Basis of Gender Equality.

Source: [Hera XXI](#)

Opposition to the so-called March for life in Croatia in May 2019

March for freedom 2019 held in Rijeka, Croatia on the 18th of May

Citizens of Rijeka, an informal group organized by a number of individuals and activists, organized their second annual March for freedom as opposed to the so-called March for life which took place in Rijeka on the same day.

First March for freedom took place in 2018, as a reaction to the first-ever organized so-called March for life in Rijeka. People self-organized and showed high resistance and managed to gather more than 2000 people who do not support the activities of the anti-choice and pro-power groups in the country.

This year's March promoted solidarity and union, anti-fascist values and ideas about a more just world. Themes were the deprivation of rights in terms of labor and social rights and the collapse of the health system, which are all the topics that are of high importance to the citizens of the country. The program consisted of speakers on these topics and music numbers. The group organized a projection of the documentary "Abortion backlash in Europe" on the 15th of May in Rijeka.

During the so-called March for life thirteen independent pro-choice activists did a sit in front of the March for Life and were arrested by the police. According to the activists, the security guards of the so-called March for life were violent towards this group.

Resistance in Croatia

At the same time when the so-called March for life and March for freedom took place in Rijeka, Osijek had their first so-called March for life as well, which prompted pro-choice activists from

Osijek to stand near the so-called March for life with transparent saying “Women are not murderers”.

After the weekend of the March for freedom in Rijeka, the so-called Marches for life happened in Zagreb, Split, and Zadar. The activists in Zagreb did a sit-in as well (and the people were arrested) and there was organized an online and offline action of #RedResistance, when women did all sorts of things with red color to show solidarity and anger in regards the anti-choice and pro-power marches which were occurring in the country.

In Zadar, the pro-choice activists organized a number of activities, including projection of the documentary Abortion backlash in Europe and holding signs and defending their right to bodily autonomy during the so-called March for life.

On island Korčula a group of activists organized projection of the documentary “Abortion backlash in Europe” and hosted a discussion after the event. Furthermore, the group did a radio show on this topic as well.

The numbers of people attending so-called Marches for life are declining, while pro-choice resistance is on the rise. No pasaran, we are not going back!

Source: [CESI](#)

Attack on the Sexual Assault Crisis Center and the Women’s Resource Center by nationalist groups

The Sexual Assault Crisis Center (SACC) is the only Center in Armenia that provides services to survivors of sexual violence, including minors. The organization was founded in 2013 within the Women’s Resource Center.

On May 4, 2019, SACC organized a presentation of the book called “My Body is Personal” at Bookinist café in Yerevan. During the event about 25 people broke into the café and made a disturbance, causing the event to be canceled. The initial statement on the hooliganism that had occurred during the event can be found [here](#).

In the days leading up to the event and after, an organized campaign and “witch hunt” against women’s rights defenders has been taking place. Serious threats and harassment are not new to the SACC and WRC teams, but these latest threats reveal once again the shrinking space human rights defenders are witnessing in Armenia.

Organized media attacks via fake news articles and social media posts inciting violence and harassment against human rights defenders are becoming part of women’s rights defenders’ daily lives.

Members of the organization have received death and rape threats with some even threatening to burn them alive. All this has caused great apprehension among their family members, friends as well as the organizations beneficiaries and stakeholders.

The entire responsibility for disrupting and fragmenting the society, provoking hatred and pitting people against each other through manipulations and fabricated stories, lies with a group of aggressive nationalists.

Under these circumstances, we were not able to properly carry out our responsibilities and continue to provide psychological, legal and advocacy support to victims of sexual violence, since our hotline has also been under constant attack.

We urge this group of men to recognize the burden of responsibility for the situation they have created – inciting violence against various groups of people, and for that reason, even beyond their control, creating a wave of crime and violence against women human right defenders.

One positive development has been the reaction from the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, Ms. Zaruhi Batoyan. She released a statement condemning the hooliganism and the fact that SACC's legal activities were being hindered. This is the first time an official statement was made after this kind of incident. After making the statement, she was also targeted with sexist, misogynistic and ableist attacks.

Unfortunately, the same support has not been seen by the police. Right after the attack we reported the case to the police, but they decided not to pursue a criminal case. We therefore appealed to the Prosecutor's office..

The police's decision not to take up the case demonstrates that the state authorities, especially the police, do not consider addressing these types of attacks to be a priority.

Source: [Women's Rights Centre](#)

A new Bulgarian project for Roma women

Gender Alternatives Foundation launched a new project, called "Knowledge for Change", funded by Bulgarian Fund for Women. The duration of the project is 6 months and will be implemented in the period February-August 2019. The project is focused on vulnerable social groups, especially on Roma women, to inform and defend their rights by conducting information days to discuss legal and psychosocial issues. Activities will empower target groups by raising their awareness and knowledge of the judiciary and institutions where they can complain and receive aid for discrimination or other human rights violations, including early / forced marriages, trafficking in human beings, domestic violence, displacement / property issues, police violence and hate crimes. An assessment of their needs as well as surveys will be prepared, which will be used to prepare a report to be presented to the public at the end of the project. Through the activities that are set up, those whose rights are violated will have access to information and help, and they will be informed and guided. Within the framework of the project will be prepared and so on. "Help map", where the most important and needed institutions (court, police, prosecutor's office, social services, copper units) will be depicted where these groups can seek help.

Source: [Gender Alternatives Foundation](#)

RESOURCES

New waves of anti-sexual and reproductive health and rights strategies in the European Union: the anti-gender discourse in Hungary

Under international and European human rights law, women's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are regarded as human rights and seen as a vital aspect of achieving gender equality. Core international and human rights laws, which are also included in European human rights treaties, demand the Council of Europe (CoE) states to respect and protect women's SRHR through the ratification of international treaties, such as the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This means that all EU member states are obligated to comply with these standards by providing all women with accessible, affordable and good quality sexual and reproductive health care and services.

Over the past decade, however, the EU has been facing overlapping and ongoing crises due to the social and political effects of the 2008 economic crisis. As the EU established new mechanisms of economic governance with the extension of austerity politics to tackle the economic crisis, this led to the de-democratisation of decision-making procedures by moving decision-making power away from democratically elected and representative institutions at the national level of the member states to new undemocratic actors and bureaucratic institutions at the EU level. Due to the EU's new focus on improving economic policy, competitiveness and budgetary coordination, through these years gender equality as a social and political goal was significantly sidelined.

Quoted above is just a short part of this [article](#).

Exploring the association between the constitutional right to health and reproductive health outcomes in 157 countries

Panel data from 157 countries, between 1970 and 2007, were used to study the associations between introducing an explicit and enforceable right to health into national constitutions and subsequent reductions in neonatal, infant, and maternal mortality and the probability of dying for adult women. The introduction of a right to health in a national constitution was significantly associated with subsequent reductions in neonatal and infant mortality rates. However, it was not associated with reductions in maternal mortality ratios and the probability of dying for adult women. The reduction in neonatal and infant mortality rates was large in countries with high scores for democratic governance, but approximately half as great in countries with low scores for democratic governance. The results suggest that introducing a constitutional right to health is likely to be an effective mechanism for improving infant health in countries with a high level of democratic governance. This health benefit is not seen in maternal and women's health outcomes. There is an imminent need to translate the constitutional promise of a right to health into the improvement of maternal health for all in the era of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Quoted above is just a short part of this [article](#).

UPCOMING EVENTS

Society of Gender Professionals Members meeting

The next SGP Membership Meeting, on Thursday, July 11th, 2019. It will offer two meeting options (with identical content) and the meetings will take place virtually to accommodate global time zones. Membership Meetings help SGP stay accountable to the needs and priorities of members. There will be an update on current activities, budget, and efforts to make the organization sustainable in the long term. SGP's new Communications Team, Standing Committee chairs, and Newsletter editors will talk about their work and we provide information on the new website (which we expect to launch that day), the new membership structure, and opportunities to join new SGP Circles.

Register [here](#).

GS16 AP - Diversity and Gender in Science: Enhancing the Value of Research and Innovation

GS16 AP will be held in Singapore, 28–29 August 2019. It will take place at “Biopolis” (The Singapore international research and development centre for biomedical sciences).

The theme for GS16 will be *Diversity and Gender in Science: Enhancing the Value of Research and Innovation*.

Registration has opened 1st March.

Call for Abstracts is **OPEN**. More information is available on [this page](#).

You can view the [programme here](#).

ASTRA Network Members: Albania - Albanian Family Planning Association; Armenia - Society Without Violence; Armenia - Women's Resource Center; Armenia - Women's Rights Center; Azerbaijan - Center "Women and Modern World"; Belarus - Women's Independent Democratic Movement of Belarus; Bulgaria - Bulgarian Family Planning and Sexual Health Association; Bulgaria - Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation; Bulgaria - Gender Education, Research and Technologies; Bulgaria - Demetra Association; Bulgaria - Gender Alternatives Foundation; Bosnia and Herzegovina – Sarajevo Open Center; Croatia - B.a.b.e.; Croatia – CESI; Croatia - Women's Room; Georgia – HERA XXI; Georgia – Real People, Real Vision; Georgia - Women's Center; Hungary – PATENT; Kazakhstan - The Legal Center for Women's Initiatives "Sana Sezim"; Lithuania - Family Planning and Sexual Health Association; Latvia - Latvia's Association for Family Planning And Sexual Health; Macedonia - Association for emancipation, solidarity and equality of women; Macedonia – H.E.R.A.; Macedonia – Shelter Center; Moldova – Family Planning Association; Moldova - Reproductive Health Training Center; Poland - Federation for Women and Family Planning; Romania - A.L.E.G.; Romania - AnA: Society for Feminist Analysis; Romania - Euroregional Center for Public Initiatives; Romania - The East European Institute of Reproductive Health; Russia - Novgorod Gender Center; Russia – Russian Association for Population and Development; Slovakia – Pro Choice; Tajikistan – Gender and Development; Ukraine - Women Health and Family Planning; Ukraine - Charitable SALUS Foundation; Uzbekistan - Future Generation

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