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DE-DEMOCRATISATION, GENDER+ AND THE POLITICS OF EXCLUSION IN EUROPE

POLICY AND CIVIL SOCIETY RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening gender+ equality policies and politics against the rise of antigender movements and institutional actors in Europe

Opposition against gender+ equality policies and movements in Europe is on the rise. Broadly defined as “any activity in which a perspective opposing feminist politics and gender+ equality policy is articulated in a way that can be expected to influence or is actually influencing politics or policymaking at any stage” (Verloo, 2018: 6), it poses serious challenges not only to gender+ equality itself but to democracy more broadly. In what follows, the *DEDEMOC network*, comprising academics, politicians and civil society actors specialised in the matter (<https://unia.es/es/i-d-i/catedras/unesco/desdemocratizacion-genero-y-las-politicas-de-exclusion-en-europa>), have identified a series of **policy and civil society recommendations** aimed at strengthening gender+ equality politics and policies in Europe, in relation to **four thematic and interconnected areas** of special relevance:

1. *The political, institutional and legal domain;*
2. *Gender+ equality movements and coalitions;*
3. *Knowledge production;*
4. *Resources and funding.*

1. Recommendations in the Political, Institutional & Legal Domain:

— Countering antigender movements and institutional actors in Europe requires first and foremost to **explicitly recognise that sexism, misogyny, racism, xenophobia, homo and transphobia, ageism and ableism are ideologies that are undemocratic and anti-democratic**, leading to inequality and violence. Hence they should be exposed and addressed as such at local, national, regional and international level.

- Countering antigender movements and institutional actors in Europe requires **strengthening EU and national policies on gender+ equality**, in particular those related to sexual and reproductive health and rights and to the development of an economic model that puts people's life at the centre, ensuring an adequate and egalitarian balance between work and family life. Hence, **a new social contract has to be developed**, which is feminist, non-racist, and equal in relation to gender and sexuality.
- Countering antigender movements and institutional actors in Europe requires **stronger social media regulations aimed at effectively countering the culture of sexism, misogyny, racism, xenophobia, homo and transphobia, ageism and ableism** that permeates social media, allowing for prevention, protection and sanctions of both hate speech and culture.
- Countering antigender movements and institutional actors in Europe requires **rules that guarantee that institutional actors such as political parties and organised interests are internally democratic**, defined in terms that include elements of inclusiveness and equality, human rights, transparency and accountability.
- Finally, countering antigender movements and institutional actors in Europe requires that **feminist and other progressive actors have long-term and stable access to the decision and policy-making processes at national, regional and international level via official institutional channels of participation in policymaking as well as a strong grounding in autonomous, grassroots movements**, so as to remain connected and accountable to their constituencies.

2. Recommendations in relation to Gender+ Equality Movements and Coalitions:

- Like institutional actors, gender+ equality movements and actors must predicate by example and also be **internally democratic, defined in terms that include elements of inclusiveness and equality, human rights, transparency and accountability as well as intersectional and intergenerational**.
- Stronger and more stable coalitions have to be built among gender+ equality movements and actors, that bridges the state/civil society divide, around **human rights, social justice and deepening democracy as fundamental common goals**, at local, national, regional and international levels, so as to foster learning and the exchange of best practices.
- Stronger and more stable coalitions also have to be built **between gender+ equality movements and actors and institutional actors in other domains that are fundamental for democracy, such as the media, in order to address disinformation and fake news, and the corporate sector**.

— Finally, **actors within gender+ equality movements and institutional coalitions need to diversify their function, particularly between, on the one hand, protecting the actors attacked by antigender movements and institutional actors and, on the other hand, actively countering their opposition** against gender+ equality.

3. Recommendations in the field of Knowledge & its Production:

— Countering antigender movements and institutional actors in Europe requires advocating for the **universal access to education, in particular, an education based on human rights, democracy, inclusiveness and equality**. This, would require, in particular, introducing **compulsory gender+ equality education** in all educational curricula, including primary, secondary and tertiary education and investing in public education programs based on human rights, democracy and gender+ equality.

— Countering antigender movements and institutional actors in Europe also requires **more funding and support for intersectional and interdisciplinary feminist, queer, anti-racist, anti-capitalist, ecological and democratic research that bridges the academia/civil society divide, as well as its diffusion beyond the academic domain**.

— Countering antigender and antidemocratic forces in Europe also requires more funding and support for **comprehensive research on antigender movements and institutional actors in Europe themselves**, with a focus on their discourses and demands, their networks and strategies and their sources of funding, **and the diffusion of the results of such research beyond academia**.

— Countering antigender movements and institutional actors in Europe requires **radically democratising academia**, including the rules that govern access to academic knowledge production and fruition, its internal functioning, including knowledge criteria, and the barriers that keep academic knowledge away from the general public, by hindering its dissemination in an accessible way.

— Finally, countering antigender movements and institutional actors in Europe requires **exposing and combatting fake news and disinformation**, by explicitly including gender+ equality within the work of organisations dedicated to such end and, importantly, by making social media accountable in regard to gender+ equality and democracy.

4. Recommendations in relation to Resources & Funding:

- Countering antigender movements and institutional actors in Europe requires **creating stable sources of funding for democratic institutions and actors, in particular gender+ equality civil society**. Such funding needs to be long-term and more flexible than project-oriented funding, which is dominant, and must include a specific line dedicated to combatting antigender movements and institutional actors, alongside other exclusionary positions, understanding them as a threat to democracy. In addition, **specific funding needs to be created to protect and defend human rights and gender+ equality defenders, journalist, activists, politicians, academics, etc.**, who are under attack by antigender movements and actors, in particular to provide for legal support.

- At EU level, this would translate into the reactivation of **direct funds to Civil Society Organisations in the field of gender+ equality**, in order to bypass in particular the national governments in which antigender movements and institutional actors have significant power.

- At national level, this could include not only the direct transfer of public funds, but other economic advantages for gender+ equality movements and actors that promote democratic and inclusionary values such as **tax exemptions** etc.

- In addition, **more funding needs to go into the research of antigender movements and institutional actors in Europe and into combatting misinformation** through responsible media.

- Finally, countering antigender movements and institutional actors in Europe requires **reviewing public procurement rules and state aid rules so as to establish human rights and gender+ equality as essential criteria for the granting of public funding**. At a minimum, such criteria should include respect for rights and freedoms recognised in national constitutions and UN Sustainable Development Goals, as well as guaranteeing **greater transparency and accountability** in the management and expenditure of public funds by the private sector. These policies should be accompanied by **gender+ equality training for civil servants and entities in charge of distributing public funds**.