

NON-OFFICIAL TRANSLATION OF THE EU ELECTION CHECK

Of Deutscher Frauenrat

Comparison of the DF demands with the EU-parties' programs: Democracy under pressure

DEMOCRACY UNDER PRESSURE

The elections of the European Parliament on June 9th, 2024 will decide whether the heart of European democracy remains the engine of progress for a liberal democracy that respects and expands women's rights. Or whether far right, populist and anti-democratic and/or anti-European parties will gain influence in the EU, destroying hard-won progress.

Far-right, populist and anti-democratic and/or anti-European parties not only threaten hard-won women's rights, they also threaten our liberal democracy.

The negative examples of Hungary and Poland before the change in government are a reminder of where right-wing nationalist and far right-ideologies can lead (constitutional) states. Similarly, the results of the recent parliamentary elections in Italy, the Netherlands and Portugal also give cause for concern.

Equal rights are an indispensable part of a democratic society and are therefore non-negotiable. Right-wing extremists and right-wing populist movements, however, see equality as a threat to an order that privileges men and subordinates women. Their rejection is not only directed against gender equality, but also against sexual and gender diversity. That is why right-wing populism, right-wing extremism, group-focused misanthropy and gender issues must be considered together and appropriate protective measures established within the political framework.

Participation is the lifeline of democracy: **EU citizens have the power to make a difference when they go to the polls!** The Deutsche Frauenrat (DF – National Council of German Women's Organizations) calls on people to vote (not only) at the EU elections in June for democratic parties that want to defend and strengthen women's rights. Regression can be prevented, and progress can be fought for – at the ballot box! Only democratic majorities can further create a strong, democratic, gender-equitable and assertive EU.

Equality in the German EU election programs¹

In order to provide guidance for voting decisions, the DF has taken a closer look of the election manifestos of the democratic parties represented in the Bundestag. Based on its [own election demands](#) (in German) and [the EU manifesto of the European Women's Lobby](#) the strong voice for women analyzes – to the best of its knowledge and belief, but without any claim to completeness – in the following EU election check

¹ The EU election check focuses on the six largest democratic parties running for the EU elections in Germany, ranked by parliamentary group or group size in the German Bundestag: SPD, CDU/CSU, B'90/Die Grünen (Alliance 90/The Greens), FDP, DIE LINKE (The Left) and BSW (Alliance Sahra Wagenknecht – Bündnis Sahra-Wagenknecht).

how the parties want to strengthen women's rights and what means/measures they want to use to promote equality in Europe.

The DF calls on people to vote for democratic parties that want to protect and strengthen women's rights. This is not the case with the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland – Alternative for Germany), which is why it is not included in the EU election check. The DF is non-partisan, but it takes sides to protect democracy and the rights of women and marginalized groups.

That is the reason why the strong voice for women urgently warns against the AfD, which repeatedly questions the rights of women in its programs and public statements, wants to roll back hard-won progress in women's policies and makes no secret of its backward-looking gender and family views/images. Furthermore, the AfD wants to abolish the EU.

Want a taste? Unwanted pregnant women are to be denied abortions. Children's rights are being called into question. Single parents – 90% of whom are women – should only receive state support if the father is granted access to the child. Organizations that support single parents are to lose their funding. Couple families with young children should be able to “live on one income again” so that one parent can look after as many children as possible full-time. The AfD also wants to combat the so-called “gender ideology” as it sees this as the enemy of the nuclear/small family. The AfD is thus aiming for inequality and restoration of a supposedly natural, patriarchal order.

It is therefore clear/obvious to the DF: [the AfD is ineligible for women](#) (longer text in German).

1. ACHIEVE EQUALITY BY 2030

a. Protect and strengthen women's rights

Gender equality is one of the EU's fundamental values and has been anchored in the EU treaties since its foundation. Right-wing extremists and populist parties, anti-democratic and anti-feminist movements are mobilizing with backward-looking and hierarchical gender models against the EU and its fundamental values. The DF calls on all parties to take a firm stand for democracy, gender equality, diversity and the rule of law and against discrimination. The rights of women and girls must be made a guiding principle of European policy. In concrete terms, this means, amongst other things, a consistent gender impact assessment, financial support for a diverse civil society, taking concrete measures against gender stereotypes, group-related misanthropy, sexism and discrimination, as well as the implementation and continuation of an adequately funded EU gender equality strategy.

Almost all of the parties surveyed as part of the election check state that the EU as a community of values is being challenged primarily by extremist or right-wing conservative and autocratic forces and that democracy and the rule of law are therefore under pressure. The exception is BSW which describes the policy of the “EU technocrats” as a threat to democracy and sees the integration of Europe as an “aberration” or “false path”. The newly founded party calls for EU regulations not to be implemented if

they “run counter to economic reason, social justice, peace, democracy and freedom of opinion”, which would open the door to arbitrary implementation of EU directives.

Of the six parties, SPD, B’90/Die Grünen, FDP and Die Linke are explicitly and with concrete proposals against discrimination and exclusion and for a diverse Europe. In its program, the SPD emphasizes “women’s rights, the rights of people of color as well as the rights of people with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ people are human rights” and advocates that the EU Commission should bring member states before the European Court of Justice that violate the values of Article 2 of the EU treaty.

For B’90/Die Grünen the EU is a „guarantor of gender equality“ which should permeate “all policy areas”. B’90/Die Grünen are the only ones to explicitly support women’s rights organizations (from countries in the Global South). The FDP wants the EU to work closely with the human rights institutions of the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations cooperates. Die Linke proposes binding anti-sexism regulations in the public and private sectors and transnational monitoring projects to keep an eye on the networking of the extreme right.

CDU/CSU emphasizes the importance of a “European guiding culture”, a liberal order and equality between women and men.

Only SPD and B’90/Die Grünen refer to the EU gender equality strategy in their election manifestos. While SPD demands that the current strategy is to be implemented, renewed and backed up with its own budget, B’90/Die Grünen merely call for it to be evaluated.

Overall, it should be noted that – except for BSW – all parties surveyed see the fundamental values of the EU threatened by extremist and autocratic forces and mention equal rights for all people in their programs, which must be protected and strengthened.

b. Ensuring equal representation and participation of women

A central aspect of gender equality is the equal representation and participation of women at all levels. The DF has formulated concrete demands for the realization of this goal, such as equal representation in parliaments and EU decision-making bodies as well as effective legal regulations or the advancement of women in the private sector. These demands are reflected to varying degrees in the EU election programs of the democratic parties.

The election manifestos of SPD and B’90/Die Grünen contain a commitment to more equal participation and link this to concrete demands such as quotas in the political and economical sphere, including equal representation in the EU Commission. The DF’s demand for an EU Commissioner explicitly for women’s rights can only be found in SPD’s election manifesto. B’90/Die Grünen place a particular emphasis on the participation of women and girls in the context of EU diplomacy.

The other democratic parties remain more vague in their demands or do not mention corresponding measures in their programs: CDU/CSU does not address this issue. Also, FDP advocates various fundamental innovations to improve participation as part of a reform of the EU Direct Elections Act but explicitly opposes the introduction of a gender quota. Die Linke calls for “the full participation of all people

in all areas of society” but is reluctant to make specific demands and BSW simply calls for greater civic participation which is not specified.

c. Making labor market and social policy gender-equitable

Up to now, the EU has provided pioneering impulses for a gender equality orientation in labor market and social policy. The Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers set Europe-wide standards for a better work-life balance and gender-equitable salary structures. The DF is calling on the democratic parties to set the European framework conditions for a social policy and strengthen them further.

A look at the election manifestos shows that the SPD, B’90/Die Grünen and Die Linke are committed to the consistent implementation of the Pay Transparency Directive and the (monetary) upgrading of female-dominated care professions. The demand for a better work-life balance can be found in all programs – with the exception of the BSW – of the democratic parties, although the political solutions proposed vary: CDU wants to help women in particular to switch from part-time to full-time work. The FDP wants to foster the expansion of affordable childcare and enable MEPs to vote online after the birth of a child. SPD, B’90/Die Grünen and Die Linke are committed to, among other things to close the gender care gap by giving more men responsibility for care work.

Overall, the election manifestos of SPD, B’90/Die Grünen and Die Linke propose the most far-reaching measures for a gender equitable labor market and social policy. In comparison, CDU/CSU and FDP only formulate selective demands. The BSW’s election manifesto completely dispenses with a gender perspective in this policy area.

d. Feminist orientation of EU policy, including climate and trade policy

Climate

Women are disproportionately affected by the impacts of the climate crisis.² At the same time, they are important actors who must be fully involved in the green transition in order to drive it forward.

Unfortunately, this insight is only reflected in three out of six reviewed election manifestos. CDU/CSU, FDP and BSW do not address the gender aspects of climate policy. In contrast, B’90/Die Grünen demand that “climate-neutral” must always also mean “socially and gender equitable”. SPD and Die Linke demand Gender impact assessments in the climate sector. SPD is leading the way here and is campaigning for a feminist Green Deal.

In terms of gender-equitable climate policy, there is therefore great variance between the parties.

Trade and economy

The DF is committed to the transition to an ecological and social market economy, ensuring that the gender perspective is anchored in trade agreements and a strong law on supply chains (Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD)). To enable women to secure their own livelihoods, a fair

² See DF position paper on Climate: [Climate justice now – approaches for a feminist climate policy!](#) (in German)

distribution of care work is necessary. In order to raise awareness of the value of care work, the supply economy should be reported annually.

This last demand has not yet been included in any of the election manifestos, although it would be easy to implement. B'90/Die Grünen, Die Linke and SPD have set themselves the task of re-evaluating and redistributing care work and upgrading care professions. While the CDU and FDP reject the European supply chain Act (CSDDD) in its current form, the SPD, B'90/Die Grünen and Die Linke are in favor of a strong human rights-based law. Regarding trade policy, the latter three parties see the need to safeguard human rights in the agreements and tackle global inequality. Die Linke wants to include women's networks in negotiations on trade agreements for this purpose. B'90/Die Grünen are guided by the UN Sustainable Development Goals. SPD advocates for a feminist perspective in trade policy.

2. IT'S THE RESULT THAT COUNTS – INTRODUCING GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT

In the EU, gender mainstreaming – i.e. the obligation to take gender equality aspects into account from the outset in all decisions – was included in the Treaty of Amsterdam, which came into force in 1999 and subsequently regulated the Treaty of Lisbon (2009) in art. 8 TFEU.

This requires a consistent gender impact assessment in all policy areas and thus the systematic review of the gender-specific effects of each policy (impact assessment), every measure, every regulation, every directive and the entire EU-budget. The EU budget in particular is an important steering tool. A fair distribution of EU budget funds can only be achieved if gender equality is considered from the outset. The DF welcomes the fact that corresponding measures have been included in two of the election manifestos analyzed here. The election programs of SPD and, B'90/Die Grünen contain specific calls for gender budgeting, with the latter also calling for the introduction of gender equality checks. Although Die Linke calls for a larger budget and more resources in the area of gender equality, it does not make a concrete demand for a gender-equitable budget. The election manifestos of the CDU/CSU, FDP and BSW make no mention of gender impact assessment and a gender-equitable budget.

Reducing the financial resources of states that violate fundamental rights and values of the EU is also included as a demand in several election manifestos. While the CDU/CSU only refer to existing sanctions procedure for violations of the rule of law, SPD and FDP demand an extension of this sanctioning option to include violations of other values in Art. 2 TEU. FDP further mentions violations of the civil rights of LGBTIQ+. B'90/Die Grünen would also like to include violations of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the sanctions procedure.

3. ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Violence against women and girls is the most widespread human right violation. For many women and girls in Europe, violence is part of everyday life. It is an expression, consequence and cause of structural inequality between women and men. With the ratification of the Istanbul Convention and the Directive against violence, the EU has already taken important steps in the past year to combat violence effectively.

It is therefore pleasing that all parties, with the exception of the BSW, are in broad agreement that the Istanbul Convention must be implemented throughout Europe. It is clear that the issue is a real concern for the parties. Various parties are proposing differentiated measures in their programs. The SPD has chosen a holistic approach to combating violence and has set itself the goal of preventing violence and combating cyber violence, among other things. B'90/Die Grünen and Die Linke take an intersectional perspective in the protection against violence with the corresponding measures. SPD and B'90/Die Grünen are committed to advocate the adoption and implementation of the directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence. Unfortunately, the ILO-Convention 190 against sexual harassment and violence in the workplace is not mentioned by either party.

4. PROTECT AND STRENGTHEN SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Sexual and reproductive rights are human rights. Every person has the right to self-determined decisions regarding sexuality, pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood - free from discrimination, violence and coercion. Last but not least, the so-called Matić report calls on the EU member states to ensure sexual and reproductive health and to eliminate discrimination. The DF is committed to non-discriminatory access to health services and relevant information as well as self-determined family planning, sex education, unrestricted access to contraceptives and the prevention of gender-based violence, such as female genital mutilations. It is pleasing that the SPD, B'90/Die Grünen, FDP and Die Linke have anchored the strengthening of women's health in their election manifestos. The CDU/CSU and BSW omit this topic entirely.

The SPD, B'90/The Greens, FDP and Die Linke are committed to an access to safe abortion. In addition, the SPD, B'90/Die Grünen and Die Linke have set down the goal of having unrestricted access to contraceptives in their election manifestos. The promotion of gender-specific research is supported by B'90/Die Grünen and Die Linke. FDP focuses on the legalization of egg cell donation and surrogacy as well as a Europe-wide endometriosis action plan. Die Linke and B'90/Die Grünen are particularly committed to the rights and healthcare for queer people. Only SPD mentions sex and relationship education in its election manifesto. Protection against female genital mutilation is not mentioned by any of the parties.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights are an important issue for four of the six parties surveyed – albeit with different priorities.

5. EFFECTIVELY ENFORCING THE RIGHTS OF REFUGEE WOMEN AND GIRLS

Human-rights-based and solidarity-based migration and refugee policies are indispensable in the EU. To ensure this is more important than ever in the view of the new asylum pact. Women, girls and queer people in particular must be specifically considered as a vulnerable group in a European asylum policy.

While all election programs contain content on migration and refugee policy, the special needs of refugee women, girls and queer people are hardly mentioned. Although the basic humanitarian protection from prosecution is a consensus in all election manifestos, the extent and form of this protection varies greatly.

The demands of FDP, CDU/CSU and BSW focus primarily on curbing migration. Moreover, FDP is in favor of setting up European asylum centers at the EU's external borders. CDU/CSU backs the European migration pact, while BSW focuses primarily on curbing the causes of flight locally.

SPD, B'90/Die Grünen and Die Linke stand for a refugee policy based on solidarity. They oppose the outsourcing of asylum procedures to third countries (i.e. non-EU-countries) and want to create legal and safe escape routes. B'90/Die Grünen and Die Linke emphasize that fair working conditions and protection from exploitation must be guaranteed for all people. Die Linke also uses the example of the refugees from Ukraine to show that the admission of refugees, regardless of their origin must be faster and less bureaucratic and that people without a residence permit should also receive comprehensive healthcare.

However, SPD and B'90/The Greens only address the specific protection of women, girls and queer people to a limited extent. The SPD mentions the exception of families with children and that other vulnerable groups should be given special attention. Die Linke calls for accommodation and shelters that meet the needs and requirements of women refugees and their children as well as for trans and queer people and specialist staff with gender- and queer-sensitive training in the accommodation facilities. The individual needs of particularly vulnerable groups should be considered, and civil society initiatives and NGOs should be financially supported and be strengthened.

Concrete approaches to protection against violence for these particularly vulnerable groups on refugee routes and in initial reception camps, as well as the granting of a residence status cannot be found in any of the election manifestos.

Overall, the perspective of vulnerable groups is given little consideration in the election manifestos.

6. ADVANCING FEMINIST FOREIGN AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Gender equality must become a guiding principle of European foreign policy and in international and development cooperation. EU foreign policy should implement the 4Rs: rights, resources, representation and research.

Four of the six parties examined do not address the concept of a feminist foreign policy or explicitly address a gender perspective in foreign and development policy.

In contrast, there is broad agreement between the demands of the DF and the proposals put forward by SPD and B'90/The Greens. The DF recommends securing resources from the outset in order to avoid getting into a similar situation at EU level as is currently the case at the federal level, where funding for feminist development aid continues to be cut.