



## Korčula School 2025 Korčula, 27-28 August 2025 REPORT

### Losing Ground, Gaining Voice: *Rethinking Feminist Resistance in an Age of Populist Backlash*

The CEE Gender Network, in the preparation for the 2025 Korčula School think tank has opted for a “three-pronged approach”, meaning that the Korčula School will have three events – the one in Korčula itself dedicated to gender equality looking at the backlash, an expert meeting in North Macedonia on urbanism and environment and in the fall a regional high-level political meeting of socialdemocratic and progressive leaders in Tirana.

The meeting on the 27th and 28th of August was in round table format, with two speakers to introduce the topic at each session. The title of the event was “Losing Ground, Gaining Voice: Rethinking Feminist Resistance in an Age of Populist Backlash”. The event was partnered with PESW, the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity and the Olof Palme International Center.

The core aim was to critically examine the global and regional backlash against gender equality and feminist policies by unpacking the conceptual, political, and ideological critiques put forth by right-wing actors. This reflection explored how these narratives have influenced public discourse and shaped perceptions of gender equality, particularly within the context of social democratic politics.

A key focus was to understand why populist movements are successfully resonating with citizens’ frustrations—often through gendered narratives—and to identify moments where progressive, feminist, and social democratic messages may have failed to connect or inspire. The goal over time is to jointly develop strategies for re-engaging and mobilizing both traditional and emerging constituencies around the values of gender equality and social justice. One promising tool for this re-engagement is the development of cross-party strategies, fostering solidarity, and sharing best practices among social democratic parties in the Western Balkans, as well as within the broader PES network.

To mark 80 years since the Second World War, a video on the role of women in the national liberation struggle and the partisans in the former Yugoslavia was projected. A special desk review “Right-Wing Populism and Anti-Gender Movements: Contemporary Interpretations, Global Trends, and Challenges for Progressive Forces” has been prepared for this occasion

and further dissemination. The ZOOM link for the proceedings is:

[https://us06web.zoom.us/rec/share/A-5gPkoBu-oQ\\_GfbNeUzOUmAK3bjxTzOVxWMh8KgoH\\_wFjbKuoXGNnYJDt0TxEeP.ys9LI0vCuWZPNOzD](https://us06web.zoom.us/rec/share/A-5gPkoBu-oQ_GfbNeUzOUmAK3bjxTzOVxWMh8KgoH_wFjbKuoXGNnYJDt0TxEeP.ys9LI0vCuWZPNOzD) and all information can be found at <https://ceegendernetwork.eu>.

### **Round Table 1: Expert discussion: Mapping the Backlash – Who’s Afraid of Gender Equality? An introspection**

This roundtable explored the global and regional context of anti-gender movements - why are citizens turning away from feminist, social democratic politics in the Western Balkans and beyond. It referred to the emotional and cultural power of populism, nationalism, conservatism, security, belonging, and identity as populist movements weaponize "gender ideology" and traditional values viewing masculinity and misogyny as “strength and identity” politics. The question was are class, economic insecurity, and the failures of liberal feminism and the progressive socialdemocratic gender ideology to address material conditions, but also cultural concerns.

## Draft PROGRAMME

| Wednesday, 27 August 2025 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                           | Arrival                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 5:30-8:00pm               | CEE Gender Network Board meeting                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 8:00                      | Board/Advisory Council dinner                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Thursday, 28 August 2025  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 9:00-9:15                 | <b>Video: “The symbol of Resistance”</b><br><b>Opening:</b> Daša Šašić Šilović, Chair International Board, CEE gender Network                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 9:15-10:45 am             | <b>Moderator:</b> Zita Gurmai, PESW President, MP Hungary<br><b>Introductory Remarks:</b> Lola Milojević, expert; Martina Naumovska, Member CEE Gender Network Advisory Council<br><b>Discussion</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 10:45-11:15 am            | Coffee                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 11:15am-1 pm              | <b>Round Table 2: Crafting Feminist and Socialdemocratic Narratives for the Real World</b><br><ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Are our policies and language too academic, elite, or moralistic? Do we speak the same gender equality language?</li> <li>2. Is the gender equality narrative mainstreamed into socialdemocratic politics, policies and action?</li> <li>3. Do people we once claimed to represent understand us?</li> <li>4. How can we tell stories that connect emotionally without compromising feminist values?</li> <li>5. Have we adapted the gender equality and women’s rights discourse for today’s fast moving and changing world to meet the beliefs, life styles and aspirations of young people?</li> </ol> <b>Moderator:</b> Tamara Tripić, Secretary General CEE Gender Network, President Network for Democratic Dialogue, Serbia<br><b>Discussion</b> |
| 1:00-2:00 pm              | <b>Lunch</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 2:00-4:00pm               | <b>Panel 3: Reimagining Feminist Politics and action for the Next Decade –guidelines for the future</b><br><ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What would a new feminist social democratic platform look like in terms of politics and policies?</li> <li>2. What types of organisational formats and actions can progressive and socialdemocratic parties take/adapt to meet shifting challenges?</li> <li>3. Evidence of intersectional, inclusive, grassroots-based approaches that may work.</li> <li>4. How to be both radical and relatable to meet the moment and our constituency?</li> </ol> <b>Moderator:</b> Aleksandar Spasov, President, CEE Gender Network Advisory Council, Professor, Faculty of Law at the “Ss. Cyril and Methodius” University, Skopje, North Macedonia<br><b>Discussion</b>                                                                            |
| 4:15-4:30pm               | Coffee                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 4:30-6:00pm               | <b>Formulation of key messages, next steps and conclusion</b><br><b>Moderated by</b> Daša Šašić Šilović, Chair International Board, CEE gender Network                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 8pm                       | <b>Dinner reception</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Friday, 29 August 2025    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|                           | Departure                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |