



**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN  
FOUNDATION** For Freedom.

Human Rights Hub

# IMAGE OF WOMEN AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

An analysis of right-wing populist  
Party programs before the European elections

**Human Rights Hub**

ANALYSIS

# Imprint

## Publisher

Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom  
Human Rights Hub  
Rue de Vermont 37-39  
1202 Geneva



/freedom.org



/FriedrichNaumannFoundationFreedom



/FNFreedom

## Editorial office

**Dr. Michaela Lissowsky**, Head Human Rights Hub, Geneva

**Dr. Nele Fabian**, Senior European Affairs Manager, FNF European Dialogue, Brussels

**Jeroen Dobber**, Head of Global Security Hub, FNF European Dialogue, Brussels

**Greta Kiss**, Regional Project Manager, FNF European Dialogue, Brussels

**Barbora Krempaská**, Project Manager (Poland/Slovakia/Slovenia), FNF Central Europe and Baltic States, Prague

**Katharina Osthoff**, Human Rights & EU Liaison Manager, FNF European Dialogue, Brussels

**Jeanette Süß**, Research Associate, IFRI, Paris

**Rahel Zibner**, Project Assistant Spain/Italy/Portugal, FNF Spain, Italy, Portugal and Mediterranean Dialogue, Madrid

## Contact us

E-mail: [service@freiheit.org](mailto:service@freiheit.org)

## Stand

April 2024

## Note on the use of this publication

This publication is an information service of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom.

The publication is available free of charge and is not intended for sale.

It may not be used by parties or election workers during an election campaign.

be used for the purpose of election advertising (Bundestag, Landtag and local elections as well as elections to the European Parliament).

# Contents

1. Summary	4
2. Family picture	5
3. Equality	8
4. Abortion and reproductive rights	9
5. Gender-specific violence	10
6. Outlook: The right to abortion in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights	12

# 1. Summary

The upcoming European elections threaten a shift to the right in the European Parliament. The increasing influence of parties on the extreme right can have consequences for coexistence in the European Union (EU) - especially for minorities and women. The following analysis focuses on the election programs and agendas of European right-wing populist parties. The analysis examines how the selected parties assess equality and gender-specific issues, how they intend to promote them in the future or even specifically restrict them. This also reveals the extent to which women are ascribed certain roles in society, politics and the economy.

The focus of the study was on the similarities between right-wing populist and right-wing extremist parties. The election manifestos and political agendas of the following parties (in alphabetical order) were analyzed:

- Alternative for Germany (AfD - Germany),
- Fidesz (Hungary),
- Fratelli d'Italia (FdI - Italy),
- Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV - Party for Freedom - Netherlands),
- Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS - Law and Justice - Poland),
- Rassemblement National (RN - France),
- Vox (Spain).

All election manifestos were read in the respective national languages, translated by the authors and analyzed according to previously defined keywords.

The study led to clear results. The image of women is characterized by a number of similarities in the party programmes and political agendas: In Europe's right-wing populist parties, women are understood to be those who are heterosexual, live in a marriage with a man and have no

migration background. Women are considered women by right-wing populist parties in particular if they reject abortion and want to have many children.

Right-wing populist parties in Europe have another major thing in common: their view of the family. It is traditional, heteronormative and characterized solely by marriage between a man and a woman. One exception is the French party Rassemblement National, which also wants to support single mothers.

The plan to promote the "traditional" family has several political objectives. On the one hand, the aim is to counteract the prevailing demographic problem in many countries through the country's own ethnic-national offspring. At the same time, it pursues the substantive strategy of a right-wing populist migration policy. Rejection of migrants, in some cases to the point of incitement, is expressed to varying degrees in the party programs and agendas. The traditional family figuratively stands for one's own nation, which is to be strengthened, nurtured and expanded from within - with its own offspring. Other life and family models are predominantly rejected.

By focusing on the family as a protected unit, extreme right-wing parties are also deliberately trying to place the collective in the foreground and thus above the individual. This is intended to systematically weaken the key achievement of liberal democracies under the pretext of promoting supposedly family-friendly values.

Individual liberties, such as the fundamental right to self-determination over one's own body, are often negated by right-wing populist parties. This is reflected in the sometimes grotesque demands of right-wing populist parties when it comes to abortion. The analysis therefore ends with an outlook on the latest discussion at European level on the right to abortion and its possible inclusion in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

## 2. Family picture

### Alternative for Germany (AfD) - Germany

In its election manifesto<sup>1</sup>, the Alternative for Germany (AfD)<sup>2</sup> outlines a traditional family image that takes place between two genders, man and woman. Traditional gender roles are to be specifically promoted (p. 46). In various places, the AfD declares the family to be the "heart of society", which is therefore under the "special protection of the Basic Law". Although the AfD writes that all people are free to choose their respective marital status, these forms are not to be equated with "marriage between a man and a woman", according to the party. Against this background, the AfD is committed to the "classic model of the family", in which "father and mother" (not same-sex partners) "take care of their children in permanent joint responsibility" (p. 46). The family in the traditional understanding of roles appears in 26 places in the 50-page EU election program and thus represents the central focus. The inviolability and autonomy of the heteronormative family are important points of AfD family policy. At the same time, the party rejects any interference by the EU. The EU is not responsible for family policy and should therefore not interfere in families or even control them through quotas. (p. 46) No further explanation is given at this point.

Children are at the center of the AfD's family policy (p. 46). The responsibility for the child's welfare and the freedom of choice in their upbringing should lie solely with the father and mother and be protected from state intervention (p. 46). The AfD states that families in Germany are currently at a disadvantage compared to those without children and that it is therefore committed to improving the quality of life of families. Young people in particular should be encouraged to start a

family, as the party believes that the shortage of skilled workers in Germany could be remedied by increasing the number of German middle-class families with several children. The party explains that the shortage of skilled workers is a consequence of demographic change due to the increasing number of childless people (p. 46). With this interpretation, the party once again advocates targeted support for families with several children. The traditional heteronormative family image is always preferred, consisting of a heterosexual, married couple (p. 46). The party also acknowledges its duty of care towards the German minority abroad. This should be supported with schools and kindergartens in order to safeguard German culture and language across borders (p. 32).

### Fidesz<sup>3</sup> - Hungary

At the time this publication went to press, Fidesz had not presented an election program for the 2024 European elections either. The following therefore analyzes new laws or legislative proposals that Fidesz has introduced in parliament and already passed.

In 2020, the traditional, heteronormative image of the family was incorporated into the Hungarian constitution. It stipulates that the mother is female and the father is male. In its assessment of the amendments, the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe quotes the relevant paragraph from the Hungarian constitution: "Hungary protects the institution of marriage as a voluntary union of man and woman [formerly: man and woman] and the family as the basis for the survival of the nation. Family ties must be based on marriage or the relationship between parents and children. The mother must be a woman, the father a man."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Program of the Alternative for Germany for the election to the 10th European Parliament, (August 6, 2023), <https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/2023-11-16--AfD-Europawahlprogramm-2024--web.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> The *Alternative for Germany* (AfD) party has been active in Germany since 2013 and is represented in both the German Bundestag and the European Parliament in Brussels. In the European Parliament, the AfD is part of the far-right and Eurosceptic *Identity and Democracy* (ID) group. The ID brings together MEPs from nine member states, the majority of which are right-wing populist and national-conservative parties such as the Italian *Lega* and the French *Rassemblement National*. After individual AfD MEPs had already been members of this group since 2019, the AfD delegates voted to officially join the ID Group in the European Parliament at their party conference in 2023. This has further increased the influence and funding of the far right in the EU Parliament.<sup>2</sup> The AfD itself describes the EU as "deeply undemocratic" and regularly questions the legitimacy of the European Parliament.

<sup>3</sup> Hungary has a special situation with regard to election programs. At the beginning of the 2000s, it was still common for parties to present their programs before upcoming elections. Hungary joined the European Union in May 2004, and the leitmotif of the Fidesz election program at the time was "Only together can we be successful". At that time, Fidesz had only just given up its membership of the Liberal International (LI) group and joined the European People's Party (EPP). In March 2021, it resigned from the EPP group, thereby avoiding the threat of expulsion. In February, Viktor Orbán mentioned that his party might join the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Group in the European Parliament after the

elections in June. The ECR group also includes the Fratelli d'Italia, the Spanish Vox and the Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS), among others.

Since 2010, when Fidesz in tandem with the Christian Democratic People's Party won the Hungarian parliamentary elections for the first time with a two-thirds majority (this was repeated in 2014, 2018 and 2022), the political discourse in Hungary has changed significantly. Parallel to the slow decline of central democratic mechanisms and institutions in Hungarian politics, Fidesz's program has also changed. Since 2010, the party has no longer published an election program - neither for the parliamentary elections nor for the European elections. While Fidesz published a 300-page programme for the 2009 European elections with the slogan "One country says: Enough is enough", which mainly criticized the Hungarian government at the time, 2010 saw the publication of the last Fidesz programme for the Hungarian parliamentary elections for the time being. For all subsequent European elections, Fidesz repeatedly used powerful slogans such as "Respect for Hungary" (2024) or "Stop immigration" (2019). The last program from 2019 only contained seven sentences; none of them mentioned equality or the role of women. As of March 2024 and the editorial deadline for this publication, Fidesz had not presented an election program for the 2024 European elections either.

<sup>4</sup> Translation in German by editors, original in ENG: "Hungary shall protect the institution of marriage as the union of one man and one woman [previously: a man and a woman] established by voluntary decision, and the family as the basis of the survival of the nation. Family ties shall be based on marriage or the relationship between

The high importance of the family is placed in a direct context with the Hungarian nation in the constitution: "We proclaim that the family and the nation are the cornerstones of coexistence, with loyalty, faith and love being the most important values of unity."<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, it was determined that the constitution protected the right of children to have their gender identified and determined at birth.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the "Child Protection Act" of 2021<sup>7</sup> represented a significant attack on previously established LGBTIQ rights. Experts consider this law to be a trans- and homophobic propaganda law.

Following their election victory in 2010, the governing parties at the time (Fidesz, with the Christian Democratic People's Party, KDNP) announced their policy of a "family-friendly country". As a result, various packages of measures were introduced, including subsidized loans for young married couples considering family planning. The Hungarian government has since supported traditional family values and often emphasizes the role of women, especially in the context of raising children, but less in terms of building their own careers. In 2020, a ministerial position (but without its own ministry) for family affairs was created, which Katalin Novák took over. Previously, Novák had been State Secretary for Family and Youth.<sup>8</sup> Novák, who was also the President of Hungary from May 2022 until her resignation<sup>9</sup> on February 10, 2024, was Fidesz's top female duo together with former Justice Minister Judit Varga. During their long political careers, both have repeatedly spoken out in various positions in favor of the traditional family image and the role of women in society, with Novák, for example, emphasizing that women and men should not compete for the same positions and salaries in a "misunderstood struggle for emancipation"<sup>10</sup>. She always emphasized the importance of women in their role as *mothers*.

## Fratelli d'Italia - Italy

At the heart of the program of the ruling "Brothers of Italy" party<sup>11</sup> led by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni is a "Godfatherland-family policy" and an ultra-conservative, traditionalist view of women. The party program reflects a biologically determined and binary idea of gender and represents political positions in the sense of promoting a "natural, traditional family" within the framework of a Christian world view. In Italian society, however, women are also

generally assigned the traditional role of mother. Most of the party's policy measures relating to women are formulated on the assumption that women bear the main burden of care in the family, such as the so-called "women's option" for early retirement: according to this, female employees can take early retirement at the age of 58 if they have paid pension contributions for 35 years; self-employed women at 59. However, other social policy interventions are also intended to benefit traditional families. Young families, on the other hand, are to be supported in buying their own home; the state also wants to help divorced parents in financial difficulties.

## PVV - Netherlands

In its European election program<sup>12</sup>, the Dutch Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV) gives no space to the advancement of women and gender equality policy. In an analysis of the seven-page text, women are only mentioned once in the section on security and defense. The PVV addresses both men and women and sees them as equally responsible for defending the Netherlands in the national armed forces.

As previously in its program for the Dutch parliamentary elections, all policy areas are focused on the issues of migration and asylum, and here additionally on a rejection of the European Union. The PVV does not make any concrete election statements, but addresses voters rhetorically, for example by asking right at the beginning: "What future do we want for our country and for our children?" (p. 5) In its answer, the PVV advocates a "Fortress Europe" (p. 5) and explains that the EU heads of state and government have recently made massive mistakes.

## PiS - Poland

The family and the role of women as mothers are already described on the first pages of the program of the Polish party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS - Law and Justice). The woman is seen primarily as a mother. She ensures that the foundation stone for the nation is laid: the family. A woman should bear children and raise them. In order to be able to fulfill this role, a woman's health is protected by the state. Accordingly, the family's standard of living should be maintained at a good level. Although verbs such as "promote" or "support" appear 116

parents and children. The mother shall be a woman, the father shall be a man." Venice Commission (2021), Opinion 1035/2021, Opinion on the Constitutional Amendments adopted by the Hungarian Parliament in December 2020, [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2021\)029-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2021)029-e).

<sup>5</sup> Constitution of Hungary, (2024), Council of Europe, <https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?country=17&year=all>.

<sup>6</sup> Iván-Nagy Szilvia, (2020), Megszavazták az Alaptörvény módosítását: az anya nő, az apa férfi, <https://telex.hu/belfold/2020/12/15/elfogadtak-az-alaportveny-modositasat-az-anya-no-az-apa-ferfi>.

<sup>7</sup> The so-called Child Protection Act prohibits content depicting homosexuality, trans identity and gender reassignment from being made accessible to minors. Critics refer to the regulation as a "homophobia law".

<sup>8</sup> Lake <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/hu/tarca-nelkuli-miniszter-novak-katalin/eletrajz>.

<sup>9</sup> Hungary's president resigns, (2024), [Pedophilia scandal: Hungary's president resigns - ZDFheute](https://www.zdf.de/medien/2024/02/10/hungarys-president-resigns-zdfheute).

<sup>10</sup> Földi Kitti, (December 15, 2015), Még ha kedvesen is mondja, akkor is szülőgépnek minősíti a nőket Novák miniszter, <https://444.hu/2020/12/15/meg-ha-kedvesen-is-mondja-akkor-is-szulogepnek-minositi-a-noket-novak-miniszter>.

<sup>11</sup> Programma Fratelli d'Italia 2022, (2022), SCARICA IL PROGRAMMA IN PDF, <https://www.fratelli-italia.it/programma/>.

<sup>12</sup> See <https://www.pvv.nl/nieuws/geert-wilders/11194-pvv-verkiezingsprogramma-ep-2024.html>.

times in the party program, they are never mentioned in connection with women as an equal part of society, but always in the context of family support and pregnancy. The PiS declares: "The basic and most important social unit to which a person belongs is the family. It is based on a permanent union between a man and a woman."

The party manifesto lists specific measures to provide financial support for families and mothers. This underlines the importance of the topics of family and birth. The keyword "family" appears 130 times in the program text, making it the main focus of the PiS. These goals are also related to the Polish family in other policy areas, such as the defense of the country, social justice, economic stability or energy security. The term "Polish family" replaces terms such as "Polish citizens" or "nation" in various places. The party literally writes that the future of the Polish nation with its national language and culture depends on the preservation of the "normal" Polish family. The term "normal" always refers to the heteronormative family in a marriage between a man and a woman with their own children.

The image of the "normal" Polish family is explained on the very first pages of the party program. The PiS defines traditional gender roles and thus a "natural family" as a permanent union between a man and a woman with children together. This family should produce offspring. Social benefits, favorable loans, tax breaks and free public services are promised for a larger number of children. A normal, natural family could thus be privileged and better off: "We want Polish families to lead a prosperous life so that they are the main beneficiaries of the country's development." In addition, the PiS declares its determination to fight the ideologies that want to destroy the "natural family" in order to preserve it.

*"The family in its monogamous and permanent form is irreplaceable and thus forms the foundation of our civilization."*

## Rassemblement National - France

The Rassemblement National (RN) ran with Marine Le Pen as its presidential candidate in 2022 and lost to Emmanuel Macron. The party manifesto, which was structured into various themed booklets, contains two recurring motifs that reflect the RN's understanding of gender. The corresponding issue ("livret famille") promotes a pro-natal family policy. This is followed by the comment that French women want far more than two children, but that the material conditions for this are no longer given in today's France, which is plagued by a loss of purchasing power and rising rents. Instead of continuing to allow immigration into French society, the French state should grant French men and women a national preference with the aim of "strengthening the national family in order to consolidate the national community. This simple goal has been misguided for decades against the backdrop of a lax migration policy."

In particular, Marine Le Pen's election as party leader at the beginning of 2011 ushered in a change of direction. This female leader, who is very present in the media, is increasingly being used to woo the female electorate, which had long been small. These attempts at re-camouflage culminated in Le Pen's "letter to French women" (lettre aux Françaises). In it, Le Pen also referred to her own CV: she raised three children alone and twice almost became the first female president of France. In this letter, she encourages French women to take up leadership positions:

*"In general, I have made it part of my political struggle to encourage women to take their place in our society. I hope that I can contribute to this through my involvement at the forefront of public life, but above all I call on them to overcome an often unjustified form of reticence and to strive for leadership positions through and for themselves." [...] "Finally, I believe it is necessary to pay more attention to single-parent families, as a single mother of three children I have experienced the burdens of this situation myself, which is why I propose a doubling of the family allowance [note corresponds to child benefit]."*

With this positioning, Le Pen and the RN clearly differ from the Fratelli d'Italia and Fidesz.

## Vox - Spain

The content and vision of women's policy in the election manifesto of the Spanish Vox party are characterized above all by the understanding of the family. The traditional or "natural" family - always meaning the heteronormative family - is seen as the cornerstone of society, without the roles of women or men being defined more precisely. The term "parents" is used without any individual distinction between the two parts, father and mother. The family should be promoted and preserved in this constellation at all costs. Vox even proposes creating a new legal framework to protect the home and family. Citizens who act in self-defense at home - for example in the event of a burglary - should not have to undergo legal proceedings until their innocence is confirmed.

## 3. Equality

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union declares in Articles 21 and 23 that equality between men and women is a fundamental value and an objective to be pursued by all institutions and their members.

### AfD - Germany

In its European election manifesto,<sup>13</sup> the AfD states that it strives for equal opportunities for women and men and does not tolerate the unequal treatment of men and women in society. This is underpinned by a rejection of child, polygamous and forced marriages, as well as genital mutilation and full veiling. The full face veil is to be banned in public spaces, following the French model (page 13).

According to the AfD's interpretation, EU and UN institutions are destroying the European diversity of traditions, languages and regions by promoting inclusion, equal opportunities, diversity and gender equality (p. 50). The AfD criticizes the EU's promotion of equal opportunities and gender equality and thus shows that it does not stand for the full implementation of equal rights in all areas of life. Instead, women are to be pushed back into traditional roles.

### PVV - Netherlands

The PVV does not address gender equality issues in its manifesto for the European elections. In the last program before the parliamentary elections, the PVV declares: "Municipalities should not contribute to gender measures, climate mania and diversity mania." Slogans rather than electoral goals and measures are presented in simple language with short sentences. The reduction of complex issues and topics gives the party its successful positioning today. Like other right-wing populist parties, the PVV sticks to these simplified slogans. In this way, the party tries to avoid any further pressure to explain or justify itself from the outset. In its parliamentary election manifesto, the PVV also called for the dismantling of all levels of state coordination that are supposed to ensure greater diversity and equality in society. For example, the PVV announced its intention to close down radio stations that allegedly spread "climate panic and diversity propaganda". The appointment of a national coordinator against discrimination and racism is to be terminated and the current coordinator removed in order to end "political indoctrination in schools" in the same context.

### PiS - Poland

The program makes no statements about equality, gender equality or equal opportunities in working life. It states at the beginning that PiS is committed to "*the appropriate position of women in society*". However, no specific measures or further

explanations are mentioned. On the other hand, PiS emphasizes that it has introduced the lowest retirement age for women in the EU.

### Vox - Spain

Vox intends to create a Ministry of Family Affairs. This is to replace the Ministry for Gender Equality, which is considered *unnecessary, unfair and ideological* in its functions. "We will abolish the Ministry for Gender Equality [...]." According to Vox's programmatic ideas, the current funds for gender equality policy should be better invested in health, justice, security and education.

---

<sup>13</sup> See <https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/2023-11-16--AfD-Europawahlprogramm-2024--web.pdf>.



## 4. Abortion and reproductive rights

### AfD - Germany

The AfD's position on abortion is also closely linked to the topic of family in the EU election manifesto. The AfD is against abortion. Consequently, as the AfD writes in its program, abortions should become an absolute exception and only be permitted in the case of criminological or medical indications (p. 47). As justification, the AfD cites the right to life as a fundamental human right and states that a desire for abortion is diametrically opposed to this (p. 47). This position ignores the long-established freedom of women in the EU to make self-determined decisions about their bodies. The programme also states: "The AfD rejects any EU funding of organizations or measures that promote abortion."

The AfD particularly wants to support expectant mothers, although the party does not present a concrete plan for this. Adoption is accepted as a response to involuntary childlessness, but should only be possible at national level (p. 47).

### Fidesz - Hungary

Since 2012, abortion in Hungary has only been legal through surgery and no longer through medication. Since stricter legislation was introduced in 2022, surgical abortion is also only permitted in the following exceptional cases:

Health reasons: If the pregnancy endangers the life or health of the mother or if the fetus has serious genetic damage.

Consequence of a crime: Pregnancies resulting from rape or incest.

Serious crisis situation: When the pregnant woman suffers severe physical or psychological stress or is socially excluded. The law defines this vaguely as situations that can cause severe physical or psychological stress or social exclusion.

This regulation was later tightened again in 2022. According to the latest amendment to the law, a pregnant woman must listen to the fetal heartbeat before undergoing surgery before she can make her decision. This tightening of the law was intended to reduce the number of abortions. The measure has since been criticized in public discourse by activists, opposition politicians and social scientists. According to the Hungarian section of Amnesty International, this is a targeted "trauma ordinance" for women.<sup>14</sup>

### Fratelli d'Italia - Italy

The measures on family and birth rates in the party manifesto are linked to the party's stance on reproductive rights: In Italy, abortion has been permitted under Law 194/1978 since 1978. However, the right to abortion is not guaranteed practically everywhere, as a large proportion of state-run medical staff refuse to perform abortions on 'religious or moral grounds'.

Meloni is therefore of the opinion that Law 194/1978 has been "insufficiently implemented"; moreover, the most important part has been completely omitted: the prevention of abortions. According to Meloni, the law should only allow abortions in absolutely necessary cases. In contrast, the focus should be on a woman's "right to motherhood" and "safeguarding the rights of the child". Meloni's Family Minister Eugenia Roccella (FdI) has also repeatedly emphasized in the past that there can be no "right to abortion", only freedom of choice. Nevertheless, both women made it clear that, in principle, new incentives for motherhood should be created - given the low birth rate in Italy - but that the current abortion law should not be changed.

### PiS - Poland

The rights and living conditions of Polish women have deteriorated over the past eight years of government under PiS. In many cases, the restriction of women's rights has had tragic consequences, especially when it comes to reproductive health. Polish women were denied access to modern medical methods by the PiS government. State-supported gynecological care and sexual education were also restricted.

The word "abortion" does not appear in the current party manifesto. "Abortion" is only mentioned in one sentence. The topic is considered socially sensitive and is the subject of passionate debate in Poland, which is why the party avoids making any new programmatic statements on the subject. Following the Polish Constitutional Court's ruling on the almost complete ban on abortion in 2020, the PiS lost many female voters. The court ruling brought Polish women onto the streets, giving rise to a protest movement that is still fighting for women's rights today - "Strajk Kobiet" (Women's Strike).

### RN - France

Marine Le Pen has always criticized abortion in the past. However, her position has changed recently. In a legislative debate initiated in 2024 by the far-left party La France Insoumise, the RN tabled amendments in favor of including abortion in the French constitution, albeit with a narrower proposed legal period of 14 weeks. This U-turn seems to be aimed at dispelling doubts about its position on the matter; after all, in 2012 it had still spoken of "comfort abortions" ("avortement de confort") and argued that abortion was used by some women as a means of contraception. At the time, the RN was also debating whether to abolish the coverage of abortion costs. In 2012, Le Pen spoke out against enshrining abortion in the French constitution. In March 2024, the French parliament enshrined the right to abortion in the constitution - with the votes of the RN.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Csernus Fanni, ( July 24, 2022), Abortusz Magyarországon. Kinek, mikor és hogyan? Amnesty, <https://amnesty.444.hu/2022/07/24/abortusz-magyarorszagon-kinek-mikor-es-hogyan>.

<sup>15</sup> Catharina Coblenz, (March 04, 2024), Role model for Germany? - France enshrines right to abortion in constitution, WDR, <https://www1.wdr.de/nachrichten/abtreibung-verfassung->

When the expansion of artificial insemination for same-sex couples was discussed in France in 2019, the Rassemblement National voted against the text in the National Assembly. Marine Le Pen declared that "the legislator must protect the child above all other considerations", adding: "Yes, a child has the right to have a father". This position towards gay couples and lesbian women is also changing. Throughout her campaign for the 2022 presidential election, Marine Le Pen has been careful to de-emphasize her previously systematic rejection of any progress for the rights of LGBTQI+ people, including artificial insemination for lesbian couples. She commented on her increasingly indifferent attitude in the media: "I have nine million poor people to take care of, I have 5.6 million unemployed people to take care of. (...) Artificial insemination without a father affects how many people? A few hundred".<sup>16</sup>

## Vox - Spain

Vox has announced a variety of policy measures for pregnant women, including the promotion of employment for pregnant women and financial support, with the aim of increasing the birth rate. Programs to reconcile private, family and professional life for women are to be set up. Furthermore, the party wants to combat structural discrimination against women, which in Vox's view arises from the fact that they are mothers. Vox advocates access to information and support for women with problematic and unplanned pregnancies. The promotion of adoption and foster families as an alternative to abortion is mentioned separately. Political measures to protect women are rare in the party program and are only related to the rejection of Islamic fundamentalism and transgender women ("*men who identify themselves as women*"). The program contains no reference to the unequal reality of life for men and women.

"We will abolish the courts for violence against women."

Vox rates gender-specific legislation as a "*threat*", "*violation*", "*criminal asymmetry*", "*lack of protection*" or "*restriction of personal freedom*". This applies to gender equality as well as transgender rights, gender-based violence, abortion rights and

quota laws. Vox wants to pass new health laws and writes:

*"We will pass health laws that respect the right to life and physical and moral integrity. This includes a palliative care law that ensures care for people in critical and final stages of life, laws to support birth and family, and the repeal of euthanasia and abortion laws."*

At this point, Vox's conviction that gender-specific laws and initiatives promote rifts between men and women becomes apparent. Political initiatives and legislation that go in this direction are seen as disruptive to family unity. Targeting women outside abortion clinics should no longer be considered harassment under the Criminal Code. In Vox's view, harassment is covered by the right of assembly, the free choice of ideology and freedom of expression.

# 5. Gender-specific violence

In October 2023, the European Commission acceded to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence<sup>17</sup>, more commonly known as the Istanbul Convention. Through this step, the entire EU is now bound to comply with standards to prevent and combat violence against women in the areas of judicial cooperation in criminal matters, asylum and non-refoulement, and in relation to public administration. Financial, political and legislative measures can be drawn up accordingly. At the same time, the EU has created a network for the

prevention of gender-based violence.<sup>18</sup>

## AfD - Germany

The ideological radicalization of children has become an important security issue in the EU, according to the AfD. It goes on to say that children from Muslim fundamentalist homes in particular are at the mercy of radical ideologues who repeatedly call for violence in religious sermons. The EU member states

[frankreich-faq-100.html](https://www.frankreich-faq-100.html).

<sup>16</sup> Nicolas Scheffer, (April 11, 2022), *élection présidentielle* En sourdine sur les questions LGBT, Marine Le Pen reste un soutien du lobby anti-gay, TÊTU, <https://tetu.com/2022/04/11/election-presidentielle-2022-second-tour-marine-le-pen-question-gay-lgbt-programme/>.

<sup>17</sup> Council of Europe (2011), *Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*, Istanbul Convention for short.

<sup>18</sup> European Commission, (n.d.), "Gender equality strategy, Achievements and key areas for action", [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy\\_en#gender-equality-strategy-2020-2025](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en#gender-equality-strategy-2020-2025).

therefore have a responsibility to protect children and young people from indoctrination. (S. 16)

## Fidesz - Hungary

Although the Hungarian Fidesz government signed the Istanbul Convention on combating violence against women in 2014, it has not yet ratified it. Officially, ratification was rejected by the representatives of the governing parties in parliament in 2020 with the argument that the convention contradicted the Hungarian government's *migration policy* and supported a "gender ideology". The Fidesz government deliberately misinterpreted the *Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*, claiming that EU legislation would make it even easier for migrant women to enter the country.

The result remains the same: Fidesz and the Hungarian government are denying all Hungarian citizens protection from domestic violence in accordance with the international legal requirements of the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention. Accordingly, GreVio, the Council of Europe *Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*<sup>19</sup>, cannot take action in Hungary. Although measures to combat domestic violence have been enshrined in law by parliament, they do not focus on protecting the individual victim, but rather on supporting the family.

## Fratelli d'Italia - Italy

Gender-based violence and victim protection is a topic in the election program. Italy ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) back in 2014. This was accompanied by the formulation of strategic action plans against gender-based violence (2017-2020). Compared to other far-right or right-wing populist parties in Europe, Fratelli d'Italia considers gender-based violence to be a programmatic issue.

## PiS - Poland

The protection of the rights of working women or women exposed to domestic violence is not mentioned in the program. The PiS strictly rejects the Istanbul Convention and does not address the definition of violence and rape at all. Yet violence against women is also a major social problem in Poland, which has been brought to public attention by several tragic deaths of Polish women (most recently in March 2024, when this analysis was prepared).<sup>20</sup>

## Vox - Spain

Important issues such as domestic violence are only addressed in very general terms. The party's commitment to "promoting a law that protects all potential victims of domestic violence" obscures the fact that women are the main victims of this form

of violence. Vox also raises the prospect of possible changes to the law at this point:

*"We will abolish specialized prosecution offices with a purely ideological purpose, such as those for democratic remembrance and those for hate and discrimination crimes, we will integrate the current prosecution offices against violence against women into those largely dedicated to family matters, and we will provide more funding and resources to the prosecution office against corruption."*

Vox announces that it wants to increase sentences for rapists and identify released rapists in order to better protect women in the future.

At this point, Vox repeatedly calls into question the achievements of the rule of law.

<sup>19</sup> About GREVIO - Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, GREVIO, Council of Europe, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/grevio>.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Adam, (March 08, 2024), Debate on stricter sexual criminal

law, Poland, Tagesschau: ARD Warsaw, <https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/europa/polen-vergewaltigung-strafrecht-100.html>.

## 6. Outlook: The right to abortion in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights

The European Court of Human Rights has consistently recognized the lack of access to abortion services as a violation of the right to family and private life. Article 168 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union provides that health care, including sexual and reproductive health care, is the responsibility of the Member States of the European Union. Member States are therefore responsible for setting their health priorities and for organizing and providing health services and medical care. The EU's competence is limited to promoting cooperation between the Member States. However, in exercising their competences, Member States must respect the rights enshrined in their national constitutions and comply with their obligations under international law.<sup>21</sup>

On April 11, 2024, the European Parliament passed a resolution to include the right to abortion in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.<sup>22</sup> According to Article 6 of the Treaty on European Union, the rights enshrined in the Charter

have the same legal value as the Treaties themselves. Any amendment to the Charter must follow the same procedure for amending the Treaties under Article 48 TEU. This requires the agreement of all Member States.

The democratic and civic groups in the EP have taken this step towards EU fundamental rights in order to protect the dignity and rights of women in the European Union. The political debate took place against the backdrop of the US Supreme Court's decision to repeal the right to abortion in the United States, but also against the backdrop of recent national legislation by right-wing populist governments in the EU - above all Poland.

On April 11, 2024, the parliamentary group of Europe's right-wing populist and far-right parties voted overwhelmingly against the resolution.

---

<sup>21</sup> EU Commissioner Elisa Ferreira, EP 11.04.2024, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2024-03-14-ITM-003\\_DE.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2024-03-14-ITM-003_DE.html).

<sup>22</sup> European Parliament, (April 11, 2024), "*Inclusion of Right to abortion in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights*", [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0286\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0286_EN.html).

