

TRANSFORMATIONS IN FAMILY LIFE IN CENTRAL EUROPE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Abstract: *Family life in Europe has undergone many changes in the twentieth century. These include the lifestyle of women, their legal freedom, family relations, relations with partners, relations with the older generation, and relations with children. The position of women in society has also undergone many transformations. The family, nevertheless, remained the foundation of society in Central Europe in the twentieth century. Problems remain, however, in the social and family policy of the state, as women engaged in the working process give preference to their own plans and their need for self-fulfilment. The main goal of state family policy in the twenty-first century is, then, to ensure a harmonious balance between professional activity and family life.*

Key words: *the family, family life, the twentieth century*

The family, as a permanent community of a man, a woman and children (and perhaps other relations) in a common household, has undergone a complicated development. Family life in Europe underwent significant transformation during the twentieth century. Europe experienced two world wars and a great economic crisis during the century. Parliamentary democracy was threatened by totalitarian regimes, which at first enjoyed mass acceptance. It was, however, also a century of social modernisation, economic development and progressive globalisation.

These economic, political and social processes were reflected in the everyday life of Europeans, shaped the family and relations between husbands and wives and parents and children, and had an influence on the birth rate and, consequentially, on legal separation and divorce.

In many European countries, more than half of all married couples born in the period 1935 to 1950 now hold a position in society different to that of their parents. Farmers and smallholders became workers in town factories or joined the ranks of clerks and company employees. This was accompanied by an increase in the number of women working for a wage outside the home. This trend became apparent during World War Two, when women took up the jobs vacated by men doing battle on the front lines.

The social model in which the man is the family's breadwinner and the woman does the housework was, it's true, re-established in many countries after the war. The engagement of women in the working process, particularly after 1950, increased in the USSR and other socialist countries, and was accompanied by a systematic increase in education for women. Family life was, however, influenced most strongly by the process of secularisation. While in Ireland and Poland the influence of religious faith remained unchanged, this was significantly weakened at the end of the twentieth century, particularly in Russia, Bulgaria and Sweden.¹

In comparison with demographic developments in the nineteenth century, the twentieth century was marked by a gradual slowing of demographic growth, reaching zero in the nineteen nineties. This trend was not caused by wars or deportations, although eighty million Europeans were affected by these, but rather by changes in generative behaviour. It was, until the nineteenth century, usual to have as many children as possible in the first years of marriage. The death rate was high, and children worked and were later meant to provide for their parents in their old age. A decline in the child mortality rate resulting from advances in medicine and hygiene was accompanied by family planning and control of the birth rate. Growing demands on consumption, what's more, meant an increase in family expenditure on providing for children.

The decline in the birth rate even outstripped the falling mortality rate in the second half of the nineteen nineties. The number of deaths exceeded the number of births in 11 of 35 European countries, including the populous states Germany, Italy and Russia. The process of urbanisation continued, though to a lesser extent than in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Significant stagnation was seen in the migration of the rural population to the cities in the last two decades of the twentieth century. The population of certain large cities in Europe even fell, particularly in England, though also in Southern and Eastern Europe.²

A gradual increase in migration, particularly to Western and North-western Europe from areas outside Europe around the Mediterranean and from former colonies (India, Pakistan, Algeria, Turkey, etc.), though also from Asia, Africa, Arab countries and the Caribbean, was seen from the middle of the twentieth century and in particular from the nineteen seventies onwards. These immigrants had a different system of family life and relations between married couples and between parents and children, and generally did not adapt to the majority population.³

The ageing of the population was a particularly unfavourable demographic trend in Europe, as the proportion of the population aged more than 65 began to exceed the sustainable 5 %. In 1950, the proportion of the population aged more than 65 was higher than 10 % in France, Belgium, England and East Germany. This trend spread to other European countries during the second half of the twentieth century. The country with the largest number of people more than 65 years of age in the year 2000 was Italy (17.6 %), followed by Sweden, Denmark, Germany and Greece.

A significant transformation in family life in Europe was caused by an increase in marital instability. Legal separation and divorce became a mass phenomenon, parti-

¹ Glendon, Mary Ann. *The New Family and the New Property*. Toronto: Butterworth 1981, p. 5.

² Livi-Bacci, Massimo. *La popolazione nella storia d'Europa*. Bari: Laterza 1998, p. 14.

³ Schultheis, Franz. *The Missing Link: Family, Memory and Identity in Germany*. In: *Family and Kinship in Europe*. Gullenstad, Marianne - Segalen, Martine (ed.). London: Pinter 1997, p. 40-60.

cularly in the last four decades of the twentieth century, as a consequence of changes in family law and in the equality of men and women, gradually accepted since 1915 in Sweden, in revolutionary Russia and in other European countries by the end of the twentieth century. The liberalisation of divorce, which was finally established even in countries in which only separation had previously been legalised (Italy 1970, Spain 1981, Ireland 1997), has had the most significant influence.⁴

The legalisation of abortion also made an undoubted contribution to the transformation of family life. Abortion was legalised in revolutionary Russia in 1920, in socialist Bulgaria and Hungary in 1956, and in Czechoslovakia and Romania in 1957. Western European countries followed later, with Belgium being the last to do so in 1990. As a result of this change in the legislation, 7.7 million abortions were performed in Europe in 1995, as compared to 8.3 million births.⁵

The influence of the state on practically all areas of the everyday life of the population increased systematically in a number of European countries during the twentieth century. State policy impinged on family life by means of, for example, targeted legislation supporting families with children. These tendencies were reflected (besides the fascist regimes in Italy and, primarily, Germany) in, for example, a rise in the birth rate in Czechoslovakia in the nineteen seventies.

Three new types of family began to take shape in Europe towards the end of the twentieth century – families comprised of unmarried partners or cohabitants, new or reconstructed families between divorced people, and families made up of partners of the same sex.

Families comprised of unmarried couples or cohabitants have been part of European family life since the nineteen seventies. While couples from lower social classes chose this form of cohabitation in the nineteenth century largely due to financial problems, the educated middle classes of today are motivated to reject marriage in order to maintain their personal independence. This form of cohabitation was initially chosen by couples from Scandinavian countries, followed by open-minded couples in the urban environment. At the end of the twentieth century, cohabitants made up 15 % of Swedish families, 10 % of Hungarian and Czech families, 6 % of French families and just 1 % of families in Switzerland and Italy. This form of cohabitation is currently popular among young people as a way of preparing for marriage. The majority of these couples do not, however, reject the family as such, but rather the institution of marriage.⁶

New or reconstructed families formed by divorced people are a characteristic feature of European family life. Such new families accounted for more than a third of marriages in Denmark, Sweden, England and Germany in the nineteen nineties. Divorced men and women entered into a second marriage most frequently. Blood relationships with children from previous marriages thereby become less important.⁷

⁴ Stone, Lawrence. *The Road to Divorce. England 1530-1987*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 1990, p. 435-436.

⁵ Goode, William J. *World Changes in Divorce Patterns*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1993, p. 116-117.

⁶ Phillips, Roderick. *Putting Asunder. A History of Divorce in Western Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1988, p. 536.

⁷ Barbagli, Marzio. *Provando e riprovando: Matrimonio, famiglia e divorzio in Italia in altri paesi occidentali*. Bologna: Il Mulino 1990, p. 161.

A third type of European family taking shape at the end of the twentieth century involved the cohabitation of people of the same sex, without legal recognition. Their number increased more significantly among women than among men, particularly in large towns and in intellectual circles, in many European countries. This form of cohabitation was legalised in Denmark in 1989. Homosexual couples were allowed civil marriages, i.e. their registration as a couple (the question asked by the official performing the ceremony took the form “Do you, X, want to register your relationship with Y?”). The Danish model spread to Norway (1993), Sweden (1995), Iceland (1996), France (1999), Germany, Portugal, Finland and Belgium (2001), and subsequently to other countries, including the Czech Republic. These couples obtained the right to adopt children born in previous heterosexual marriages in 1997 in, for example, Denmark.⁸

Grandparents have traditionally played a special role in European family life, and guaranteed the continuity of family blood relations with their descendents. With the rise in the divorce rate and the number of incomplete families, along with the problems faced by employed mothers, grandparents have acted as a substitute for parental care for their grandchildren, thereby taking over state responsibility for family policy and the availability of social services in this area. Grandmothers have largely been responsible for contact with and care for grandchildren in European family life. Grandparents are not, however, forced to provide such social services in countries with a functional network of social services (Denmark, the Netherlands and Great Britain).

Close intergenerational family ties were typical of European family life. In 1994, for example, an average of four tenths of people over the age of sixty in European countries had contact with members of their family at least once a week. Large differences were, however, seen between the north and south of Europe. In Italy 71 % of sixty-year-olds saw their family every day, while this figure amounted to 65 % in Greece, 61 % in Spain, 60 % in Portugal and 34 % in France. The figures are lower for countries in northern Europe – 14 % in Denmark, 19 % in the Netherlands and 23 % in Great Britain.

Old people who saw their family members most frequently and provided care for their grandchildren paradoxically felt lonely. 67 % of old people in Greece complained of loneliness, 63 % in Portugal and 51 % in Italy, while just 25 % in Denmark and 38 % in the Netherlands suffered from loneliness. These correlations between the frequency of family visits and the feeling of loneliness point to the differences in the conception of family ties, influenced by the social situations of families, the standard of social services and the culture of these countries.⁹

The nuclear family predominates in European family life to this day. In the process of social democratisation, industrialisation and the institutionalisation of education, the family has ceded a number of its original functions (particular its functions of protection and production) to communal or state institutions. Its reproductive and formative function has also been restricted as a result of social modernisation, legal changes, state education and state medical care. This has led to an increase in the importance of private life and a strengthening of the emotional function of the family with its original emotional ties and intimacy. This is one area in which the role of women has not

⁸ Finch, Janet. *Family Obligations and Social Change*. Oxford: Polity Press 1989, p. 32.

⁹ Musatti, Tullia. *La giornata del mio bambino: madri, lavoro e cura dei più piccoli nella vita quotidiana*. Bologna: Il Mulino 1992, p. 233.

been reduced, remaining irreplaceable in spite of formal equality and changes in their position in public and family life. The role of women in maintaining intergenerational ties is particularly important. Women provide a continuity of emotional relationships in everyday life as wives, mothers, grandmothers, daughters and, it goes without saying, employees. This conflict between the role of women in the family and the role of women in the working process continues to be a topical issue, and women from all social classes are striving for the recognition of their rights in practice.¹⁰

European family life has undoubtedly remained unified on the threshold of the twenty-first century, in spite of numerous differences. Problems remain, however, in state social and family policy, as women engaged in the working process give preference to their own plans and their need for self-fulfilment. They play an active part in public life, while also fulfilling their duties responsibly in private life. The principal task facing state family policy for the twenty-first century is, then, to ensure a harmonious balance between professional activities and family life. Although the nuclear family still predominates statistically, there are clear signs of a new model of more extended families that do not share a traditional common home or residence, but rather mutual emotional ties.¹¹

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¹⁰ Tilly, Louise A. - Scott, Joan W. *Women, Work and Family*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978, p. 154.

¹¹ Kertzen, David I - Barbagli, Marzio (ed.). *Family Life in the Twentieth Century*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003, p. 375.

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K PROMĚNÁM RODINNÉHO ŽIVOTA VE 20. STOLETÍ VE STŘEDOEVROPSKÝCH SOUVISLOSTECH

Abstrakt: Rodinný život prošel ve 20. století v Evropě mnoha změnami. Byl to životní styl žen, jejich právní svoboda, rodinné vztahy, vztahy k partnerovi, vztahy ke starší generaci, vztahy k dětem. Postavení žen ve společnosti prošlo také mnoha proměnami. Přesto rodina zůstala základem společnosti ve 20. století v Střední Evropě. Problémy však přetrvávají v sociální a rodinné politice státu, neboť ženy zapojené do pracovního procesu preferují své plány a potřebu seberealizace. Hlavním úkolem rodinné politiky státu pro 21. století tedy je zajistit harmonický soulad profesionálních aktivit s rodinným životem.

Klíčová slova: rodina, rodinný život, 20. století