

PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY IN SLOVAKIA AND HUNGARY: SHIFTING IN THE SAME DIRECTION?

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ABSTRACT

Gender equality, and more specifically the reconciliation of work and family life, is becoming increasingly important especially in the European Union. Parental leave is one of the policy instruments that significantly alter the gender roles ascribed to men and women. Current research of Central Eastern European countries generally shows them as very different in the field of family policy, because of their different pre-socialist and socialist legacies. In this thesis, however, I focus on two Central Eastern European countries, Slovakia and Hungary, which seem to be shifting in the same direction regarding parental leave policy since 1989. In order to find how the design of parental leave policy and its objectives changed over time I use critical discourse analysis of the available legislative documents for the period 1989-2014. I find that path dependence still has influence on the development of parental leave policy, but the role of the European Union in work-family reconciliation is also important. These findings therefore suggest that the field of family policy is, even though influenced by the long history of socialism in the region, indirectly influenced by the objectives of European Union.

Key words: parental leave, Slovakia, Hungary, European Union, reconciliation, work, family

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1. Introduction

Gender equality is becoming an increasingly more important topic nowadays. Family policy as part of national social policy and more broadly the welfare state can either help in strengthening the traditional gender roles or in weakening them. Regarding their welfare state the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are often treated as one block with a uniform welfare state in which the transition processes are occurring simultaneously (Glass & Fodor, 2007; Haney, 2003). Family policy is a good case in point. Some authors (e.g. Fodor et al., 2002; Glass & Fodor, 2007; Szelewa & Polakowski, 2008) pointed out that despite some similarities in the family policies during communism, differences in welfare regulations directed at parents started to emerge in the last decades. One of such differences is a way how these countries shape gender relations as a result of their family policies, and more specifically the provision of parental leave (Fodor et al., 2002).

Parental leave (or childcare leave) is only one instrument of family policy that can help in achieving these goals. There is a restructuring of social policy in Europe going on with the focus mainly on activation (Daly, 2011). Parental leave policies together with childcare services regulate women's relationship to the labor market either by encouraging them to withdraw from the labor force, or more recently in Central and Eastern Europe by allowing them to balance the obligations of work and family life (Glass & Fodor, 2007; Szelewa & Polakowski, 2008; Javornik, 2014). Despite having been treated as a single block, scholars have more recently shown that Central and Eastern European countries, and Slovakia and Hungary more specifically, are shifting towards a more accommodating approach for women to balance work and family life.

Before 1989 we can observe cross-country variations in family policies even despite the social engineering project of the communist states (Saxonberg 2014; Glass & Fodor, 2007; Fodor et al., 2002; Kocourková, 2002). During communism, in the 1960s, a so called extended parental leave was introduced in almost all Central Eastern European countries (Szikra & Tomka, 2009). In Czechoslovakia and Hungary this was a paid parental leave that was “provided for all working mothers for 2.5 and later 3 years” (Szikra & Tomka, 2009: p. 26; Saxonberg, 2014)). Saxonberg (2014) argues that maternity leave was extended in the Visegrad countries in the 1960s. He uses the term “extended maternity leave” for this kind of paid leave as it was used mainly by mothers (Saxonberg, 2014). In this thesis I use the term parental leave for the same policy. In both Slovakia and Hungary the term maternity leave rather describes a leave that solely mothers are entitled to, that ranges from 2 to 8 weeks before giving birth and lasts from twenty-four to thirty-four weeks (Gerbery, 2014; Korintus, 2014).

Morgan and Zippel (2003) who study leave policies in Western Europe differentiate between care leave and standard parental leave. They argue that care leave is a longer type of leave that ranges from two to three years, while parental leave is an addition to the maternity leave that ranges from three to twelve months (Morgan & Zippel, 2003: p. 52). The difference is according to them also in the mode of payment. While paid parental leave is paid as a percentage of previous income, care allowance is usually a not very generous flat-rate payment that is not connected to previous employment (Morgan & Zippel, 2003). The purpose of parental leave is therefore activating, while care leaves are based on the “male-breadwinner/female-caregiver model” (Morgan & Zippel, 2003: p. 56). In their study Morgan and Zippel (2003) find that Western countries with different welfare state histories are shifting towards a similar care leave policy. In this thesis I argue that a similar shift is happening also in CEE countries. In the case of Slovakia and Hungary I use the term parental leave by which I refer to “rodičovská dovolenka” (parental leave) in the case of Slovakia and in the case of

Hungary to two types of leave and benefit – “Gyermekgondozási segély” (GYES – childcare allowance) and “Gyermekgondozási díj” (GYED – childcare payment). In Hungary there is also a third type of leave – “Gyermekgondozási támogatás” (GYET – childcare support), however, according to Korintus (2014: p. 4) this is a childcare leave that is considered as an “acknowledgment of parenthood as paid work considered for pension”, while GYES and GYED are “intended to promote childbirth and support reconciliation of work and childrearing”. In my analysis I focus primarily on GYES because it is, similarly as parental allowance in Slovakia, a universal benefit that was available throughout the whole period analyzed in this thesis (even though means-tested for a short period of time).

After the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), the reform of the social insurance systems in the region became one of the biggest challenges for the new governments because of the transition to market economy, which meant a huge challenge for the relatively generous welfare systems (Szikra & Tomka, 2009). As recent research shows the CEE countries use parental leave with often different objectives (Javornik, 2014; Szelewa & Polakowski, 2008). These similarities and differences of the welfare state regimes, and more specifically also of the family policies, in the communist era as well as in the period of transition are explained by many scholars by using path dependence and historical institutionalism (e.g. Saxonberg, 2014; Szikra & Tomka, 2009; Inglot, 2008). The historical institutionalist approach mainly claims that the recent development of the family policies needs to be analyzed also by looking at the historical legacies and at the objectives the parental leave was supposed to fulfill in the inter-war period as well as during communism. The introduction of the extended maternity leave in the 1960s was meant to encourage women to stay at home longer with their children and it represents one critical juncture in the path-dependent explanation of the development of family policies in Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary (Saxonberg, 2014). One of the reasons why there is a certain path-dependence

observable, is that after such critical juncture it is difficult to radically change this kind of “sticky” policy. Extended parental leave and its gendered effect on care and labor market participation therefore remained a significant part of the family policy in CEE countries even if in different forms and to a different extent.

While Czechoslovakia introduced in the 1960s a flat-rate, “explicitly genderizing” extended leave, Hungary introduced also a flat-rate benefit that was, however, initially available only to employed women, and also followed the inter-war tradition of favoring ethnic Hungarian women (Saxonberg, 2014). There are many studies that focus on explaining the differences in family policies among the CEE countries (e.g. Kocourková, 2002; Fodor et al. 2002; Glass & Fodor, 2007; Szikra & Tomka, 2009; Saxonberg, 2014). However, even when following different paths, it seems that Slovakia and Hungary are now very similar in terms of the length and the eligibility of the parental leave (see Korintus, 2014; Gerbery, 2014). While there are many comparative studies that include Hungary, the number of research studies on family policies in Slovakia is very small, therefore one goal of this thesis is to fill this research gap, honing in on Slovakian post-independence policy changes regarding paid parental leave. A comparison of these two countries in terms of the development of the parental leave policy since 1989 could also help us understand what drives the change in what appears, at first glimpse, to be a similar direction regarding the provision of parental leave as one component of family policy. This similarity is apparent not only in the eligibility criteria for parental leave and its length and generosity, but most importantly in the objectives that it follows (see Knijn and Smit, 2009). There is, arguably, an observable path shift in the provision of the parental leave that contradicts the differences that were examined until now in other CEE countries. The questions to answer in my thesis therefore are:

How can we explain the similarities between Hungary and Slovakia regarding their respective parental leave provisions today? Why is it that despite different historical legacies, the design and objectives of the parental leave provisions today are so similar?

To answer my research questions I analyze the legislation regarding the changes in family policy, and most specifically the changes in the design and objectives of the parental leave provisions over the period between 1989 and 2014, using critical content analysis inspired by Carol Lee Bacchi (1999) and Ruth Wodak (2002). The two countries are compared on the basis of the objectives as well as the design of the parental leave policy. The period after the fall of communism is the period when many important reforms took place that probably set or continued the historically different paths of family policies in both countries. On the other hand, the period after 2004 when both examined countries entered the European Union should provide a clearer example of convergence on a similar model. The effects of European Union are, if present, probably only possible to observe after 2004 when Slovakia and Hungary joined the EU because the enlargement process was not focusing on social policy, but rather on political, economic and legislative criteria. Because social and also family policy is solely in the competence of nation states, Kvist and Saari (2007) claim that even without direct influence from the EU institutions the new policy processes such as the Lisbon Strategy and the Open Method of Coordination give the member states a platform for discussing also policy solutions in the area of social protection.

Saxonberg (2014) claims that it was the EU pressure that influenced the decision of the Visegrad countries to make parental leave and cash benefits also available to fathers. Therefore I also examine the possible influence of Europeanization on the design of parental leave policy. Further on, there are also certain important domestic factors that likely shape the design and objectives of family policy. Morgan (2013) claims when examining path shifting in three Western European countries (Germany, the Netherlands and the UK) that partisan

politics can also shape family policies. Therefore in the first part of my thesis I also examine whether electoral competition and more importantly the governments' ideology played a role in shaping the policy of parental leave in the two examined countries, although there is empirical research showing that party ideology in Central European post-socialist nations have had no consistent impact on the direction or pace of reform in family policy (Makszin, 2013; Saxonberg, 2014).

The thesis is structured as follows. I start the analysis of the development of the parental leave policy in Slovakia and Hungary by a literature review in which I examine the theories of the development of family policies and parental leave in these two countries with a brief overview of the development before 1989. I also examine and summarize the most recent developments of parental leave policy in Slovakia and Hungary and show on what grounds they are similar. Next, I introduce my research design that focuses on two aspects of the policy instrument of parental leave which are the design and the objectives. Then, I analyze the available legislation on parental leave policy both in Slovakia and Hungary.

2. Literature review

Central and Eastern European countries despite their common history developed significantly different social policies during the period of communism (Ingloot, 2008; Saxonberg, 2014). One of them is also family policy that is important from two aspects: gender relations; and the rights of children (Saxonberg, 2014). Glass and Fodor (2007: p. 325) define family policies as those policies “directed at families to assist with and subsidize the costs of caring for children, including family benefits, maternity leave, maternity benefits, parental leave, state provided or subsidized childcare, and tax credits for children”. According to Kaufman (2002), family policies had historically different aims, either to increase birth rates (“pro-natalist approach”), as was (and is) the case of Hungary (Saxonberg, 2014), to prevent poverty (“social reproduction”), or, finally, to “promote gender equality, and to enhance human capital by supporting the healthy development of the child” (Cerami, 2006: p. 160). Parental leave as a part of family policy can also either give women the incentive to stay at home and so strengthen traditional gender roles, or it can make these gender roles weaker by encouraging men to also take part in the process of raising children. Many scholars therefore focus on the genderizing (or degenderizing) effect of family policies (Saxonberg, 2014; Daly & Rake, 2003; Fodor et al., 2002). In this section of my thesis I primarily focus on the possible explanations of differences that occurred in the development of family policies under the communist rule and the possible explanations of the development of family policies after the fall of the communist regime. In short, this chapter outlines potential explanations that could lie at the heart of cross-national similarities in the post-socialist evolution of paid parental leave in Slovakia and Hungary. Thus, this chapter outlines, first, the explanation of the development of family policies in CEE countries based on historical institutionalism, second,

the possible effect of Europeanization on the recent development of family policies and, third, the potential effect of domestic politics.

2.1. Historical Institutionalism

Historical institutionalism provides one explanation for the development of welfare states and therefore also for the development of family policies. Formal institutions play an important role from a historical perspective, because of their path-dependent character, as also Capoccia and Kelemen (2007: p. 341) argue:

“Many causal arguments in the historical institutionalist literature postulate a dual model of institutional development characterized by relatively long periods of path-dependent institutional stability and reproduction that are punctuated occasionally by brief phases of institutional flux - referred to as critical junctures - during which more dramatic change is possible. The causal logic behind such arguments emphasizes the lasting impact of choices made during those critical junctures in history. These choices close off alternative options and lead to the establishment of institutions that generate self-reinforcing path-dependent processes.”

For the development of family policies in Slovakia and Hungary this means that the parental leave policy is strongly influenced by the legacies of the past, especially the legacies of the pre-1989 period, when it was established. The identification of critical junctures can only be determined retrospectively, and therefore it is important to look for it in a broader context of events. Once these windows of opportunity close the costs of radically changing the “path” are much higher. In the context of Slovakia and Hungary we therefore have to look at the long-term development of family policies in order to identify the character of the change and its implications as parental leave policy in this region is strongly path dependent (Saxonberg, 2014).

Communist legacies are, by some authors like Crawford and Lijphart (1997) or Offe (1996), seen as largely negative because of their prospects for democratization (Cerami, 2006). In the

case of social policies, however, both communist and pre-communist legacies played an important role in the process of development (Inglot, 2008; Haggard & Kaufman, 2008; Saxonberg, 2014). Cerami (2006: p. 60) therefore uses the term “developmental path dependence” to denote that social policies in CEE countries are characterized by both the policy legacies and their continuous reconstruction and innovation. The paths of the institutional change in CEE welfare states and its mechanisms are therefore explained by Cerami (2009) through the intended as well as unintended actions of actors. Cross-national studies of welfare states show the importance of historical legacies for the institutional development of social programs later on. These historical legacies also explain the similarities as well as the differences in social policies, some argue, including in family policy (Inglot, 2008; Szikra & Tomka, 2009). One of the common features of these post-communist welfare state regimes is that they are “mixed and volatile” in comparison with the Western democracies (Szikra & Tomka, 2009). Besides this character of the social policies in CEE some authors point to their gendered nature which led also to the differences in family policies that we can observe until now (Fodor et al., 2002; Szikra & Tomka, 2009). According to Inglot (2008) the kind as well as the quality of maternity assistance has differed in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia since the 1920s.

Inglot (2008: p.127) argues that the development of family policies in CEE sheds light particularly on three common legacies of the communist welfare states: “the legacy of semi-permanent emergency, excessive bureaucratization, and deep contradictions between the ambitious goals of the socioeconomic development and the actual day-to-day tasks of social policy”. He also argues that the policy legacies in this region are crisis-related, and emergency-reactive, meaning that the socio-economic and political crises had a strong influence on the reforms of social policies (Inglot, 2008). Even though times of economic crises did not necessarily lead to cuts in social benefits, and neither did economically

prosperous times lead to improvement, the crises were usually followed by some short-term improvements without restructuring areas that were necessary to a broader electorate (Inglot, 2008). The social policies can be therefore described as a mixture of Soviet-style policies as well as the specific national legacies at the end of the 1980s. Szikra and Tomka (2009) suggest that besides the historical institutionalist explanation and the concept of path dependence also the concept of welfare culture is useful for explaining the differences in social policies among post-communist countries.

Saxonberg (2014) applies historical institutionalist approach to his analysis of family policies and their gendering in four post-communist countries: Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. He identifies four main critical junctures in the historical-institutional development that had a great impact on gender roles without this being an initial purpose of policy makers (Saxonberg, 2014). The four critical junctures are: (1) the institutionalization of the two-tier model of public childcare, including nurseries for children under the age of three, and kindergartens for older children (late 19th century), (2) the making of kindergartens for the children from the age of three a fixed part of a national school system (first half of the 20th century), (3) placing nurseries for children under three under the supervision of the Ministry of Health (1950s), and finally (4) the introduction of a paid extended maternity leave (1960s), i.e. paid care leaves (Saxonberg, 2014). The last critical juncture in the development of family policies is crucial for the development of parental leave before and after 1989, however, this process is also influenced by the preceding three critical junctures. According to Saxonberg (2014) the conservative reform of family policy introduced in the 1960s that encouraged women to stay at home with their children happened in the period when whole regimes in CEE countries went through reforms. Even though the socialist rhetoric was rather to “emancipate” women the belief was still that only women can take care of their children, especially during the early years. Together with the discourse that was developed in this

period by physicians and psychologists on how the nurseries have a bad effect on children, the political atmosphere also created an opening for the introduction of extended maternity leave (Saxonberg, 2014). On the other hand, Kocourková (2002) argues that the extended maternity leave was introduced in Czechoslovakia and Hungary in order to encourage childbearing and therefore served primarily pro-natalist goals.

In Czechoslovakia, this extended maternity leave was introduced in 1964 and it was increased to three years in the 1980s, but as also its name suggests it was only open to mothers (Saxonberg, 2014). However, Saxonberg (2014) points out that even if men have been allowed to take it, the benefit that was provided was too low for men to give them incentives to stay at home. This kind of flat-rate extended leave was according to him based on the inter-war Bismarckian legacy (Saxonberg, 2014). This legacy is, however, not Bismarckian in the sense of a means-tested benefit based on social insurance as characterized by Esping-Andersen (1990), but rather in the sense that Bismarckian models are shaped by the preservation of traditional family. Similarly, Hungary followed its inter-war policy legacy by introducing a more generous and longer lasting benefit than Poland and Czechoslovakia (Saxonberg, 2014). First, Hungary introduced the GYES benefit (Gyermekgondozási segély) which was a flat rate benefit paid for the maximum of two years and later in 1969 this benefit was extended another six months which together with the six-month maternity leave after giving birth equaled to three years (Saxonberg, 2014; Szikra & Tomka, 2009). Based on Barta et al. (1985) this benefit was at first available only to women employed at least for one year and later it was made universal, but fathers were allowed to take it only after 1985 (Saxonberg, 2014; Fodor et al. 2002). Second, an income-replacement leave (GYED – Gyermekgondozási díj) was introduced in 1982 that is seen as rather generous as it amounted to 75 percent of the mother's income until the child reached the age of two after the woman also completed her maternity leave of six months with a hundred percent income replacement

(Saxonberg, 2014; Ferge, 2001). Saxonberg (2014) further points to the role of actors that can be seen in the differences of extended maternity leave policy in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. While Czechoslovakia chose the more genderizing path, Hungary's policy was more degenderizing in a sense of its generosity based on the promotion of "ethnic fertility" (Saxonberg, 2014: p. 106). In the case of Hungary this decision was mainly affected by the deputy prime minister Csehák who wanted to increase the falling birth rates (Saxonberg, 2014).

The paternalist character of the communist regime caused that the support of family by the state was expected even after 1989 (Fodor et al., 2002, Cerami, 2006). According to Cerami (2006: p. 170) the post-communist governments aimed to target the family "in order to amortize the costs of transition, giving to this institution the important role of main engine innovation". Therefore in the period after the collapse of the regime we still can identify the communist legacies in the provision of parental leave that remained an important part of the family support (Cerami, 2006). However, as Fodor et al. (2002) note the spending on welfare was reduced in the period after 1989 and therefore also spending on family benefits declined in all the CEE countries. Hungary kept its GYES and GYED and Slovakia as a newly independent country after 1993 introduced a parental allowance for parents with children under three (Cerami, 2006). Immediately after the collapse of the regime, however, little changed, new laws regarding family policies were passed only in the middle of the 1990s (Fodor et al., 2002; Ferge, 2001). In Hungary this period meant neoliberal reforms including the introduction of means-tested family benefits by the socialist-liberal coalition in 1995 under the pressure from international organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank (Ferge, 2001; Fodor et al. 2002, Haney, 2003). However, this period has not lasted long as the new conservative Christian/nationalist government in 1998 reintroduced universal family benefits (Ferge, 2001; Fodor et al. 2002). Under the third government, from 1998, we can,

according to Ferge (2001), see a shift towards the better-off families in the provision of benefits, as the insurance benefit (GYED) was reintroduced in 2000 that caused an increasing gap between the flat-rate and the earnings-related benefit. Essentially the parental leave in Hungary after the collapse of the communist regime follows its inter-war and socialist legacy - targets certain groups of middle class women and supports those women who want to stay at home for the first two years after giving birth. In the case of Slovakia right after gaining independence in 1993 only minor adjustments were made in parental leave policy, mainly by experimenting with the level of benefits, but the flat-rate parental leave still remained one of the most generous family benefits in the country (Bednárík, 2012). The path-dependent development of family policy including parental leave still continues and the collapse of the communist regime in 1989 has not constituted a critical juncture that would cause a radical policy change (Saxonberg, 2014; Inglot, 2009).

The historical-institutionalist perspective explains the recent development of family policies in CEE mainly through the pre-communist and communist legacies that created institutions that are rather difficult to reform. This is partly caused also by the expectations of the constituents who got used to the paid parental leave during socialism and therefore radical changes as the Bokros plan introduced in Hungary in 1995 led to protests (Saxonberg, 2014; Haney, 1997). The extended maternity leave that is seen by Saxonberg as a critical juncture was not followed, according to him, so far by another critical juncture in the form of the collapse of communism. There are different theories that explain the development of family policies (or work-family policies) after the fall of communism. In the following part I analyze the literature concerning the role of the European Union institutions and the process of Europeanization in the area of social policy and more specifically in the work-family policies.

2.2. The Role of the EU and Europeanization

Since both the countries analyzed in this thesis joined the European Union in 2004, it is also important to take into consideration the role of the EU in influencing family policies. According to Cerami (2006) even despite the ambiguities present in the EU policy making, the enlargement process together with the financial assistance programs had influence on the solidarity in CEE countries after the fall of communism that would have been otherwise abandoned for the sake of the market competition. However, he also points out that a large part of what is going on in Central Europe is not just the adoption of internationally transferred welfare state, but “a complex mechanism of institutional creation, in which an on-going process of structuring, de-structuring and restructuring of existing welfare institutions is resulting in the emergence of a new European-friendly welfare regime” (Cerami, 2006: p. 225). Since the 1990s the EU recognized the importance of the reconciliation of paid work and care and of the equal sharing of responsibilities for care between men and women, encouraging men to take up more family responsibilities (European Council Resolution, 2000) and by encouraging women’s employment (Knijn&Smit, 2009: p. 498). Similarly, also:

“EU politicians recognize that it is mostly women who are halting their career; also long-term maternity leave can result in low labor market participation, with implications for pensions and skills. Hence, the Commission urges the member states to promote women’s access to paid work.” (Knijn&Smit, 2009: p. 498)

Also Pollert (2003) claims that gender mainstreaming is a part of the social dimension of harmonization in the EU and through the process of enlargement this can also influence the reconciliation of work and family life through dedicated family policies, especially paid parental leave. As Kvist and Saari (2007) point out, however, enlargement does not directly influence the social protection in the candidate countries because of the limited EU legislation on social protection. Nevertheless, after the CEE countries became members of the EU they could also participate in the EU-level arena that in the case of social protection mainly serves

as an arena for collaboration, exchanging knowledge, monitoring developments and collecting information (Kvist & Saari, 2007). It is perhaps mainly for this reason that one should expect Europeanization to matter for family policy objectives and design. This kind of indirect influence should be mainly visible in using family policies and more specifically parental leave policy with the same objectives that are declared by the European Union. A certain convergence of parental leave policy should be therefore visible among member states including Slovakia and Hungary in terms of declared social objectives.

The cooperation in social policy is on the EU level declared primarily in long-term strategies. The European Employment Strategy together with the Lisbon Strategy meant an initiative towards the strengthening of social cohesion (Van Vliet, 2010). In 2000 after the Lisbon Summit the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) was introduced and implemented in the European Employment Strategy (EES) and Social Inclusion Policies (Knijn & Smit, 2009). The primary objective of the OMC is to facilitate the cooperation of EU member states towards the goals of the European Union (Van Vliet, 2010). Based on Knijn and Smit's study (2009) the EES Guidelines and the Joint Employment Reports together with the National Action Plans were the basic instruments of the OMC after its introduction. These instruments were supposed to promote higher employment rates as this has been one of the major objectives of the EU policies. This means also that work-family reconciliation and the policies of equal opportunity – degenderized paid parental leave for instance - were re-directed towards this goal (Knijn & Smit, 2009). EES documents also promote affordable childcare and short care leaves (Knijn & Smit, 2009). We should therefore find certain convergence towards these goals in post-accession national legislation in Slovakia and Hungary. These policy instruments that can be identified on the EU level in the area of social policy represent a so called “soft law” as they are not binding. Therefore Knijn and Smit (2009) rather focus in their study on the actual documents submitted by the member states, which, however,

represent only the intentions of member states and are not a proof of the implementation of any policies. They find that a prevailing policy paradigm in most of the EU member states' National Action Plans (NAP) and National Reform Programs (NRP) is the social investment approach (Knijn & Smit, 2009).

Esping-Andersen (2002), Giddens (1998), Jenson (2008, 2009) and Jenson and Saint Martin (2006) characterize the social investment paradigm as based on three principles: "First, life-long learning as a condition for employability; second, orientation to the future with particular attention for investments in children; and third, investments in individuals as beneficial for the community" (Knijt & Smit, 2009: p. 486-487). In the case of Hungary the social investment paradigm is mainly present in the reduction of social security contributions for parents and the right to return to work after childcare allowance as mentioned in NAPs and NRPs (Knijt & Smit, 2009: p. 507). In the case of Slovakia, on the other hand, Knijt and Smit (2009: p. 508) identify the intention to extend the quality and affordability of childcare services and the equal opportunities in social policy.

Demographic changes as part of the European discourse are also an important topic that has been investigated by the European Commission throughout the years, mainly focusing on the ageing of the population and family policies (Saari & Kvist, 2007). One of the documents issued by the European Commission on the topic of demographic changes is the Green Paper published in 2005 ("Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations" – COM (2005) 94, March 2005), that calls attention to the reconciliation of work and family life in an attempt to promote the higher fertility rates and longer careers in work life (Saari & Kvist, 2007). The EU concerns to find solutions for the problem of unemployment and the low labor market participation are also reflected in the EU pushing this agenda also to be addressed on the level of member states (Lewis, 2006). Based on Lewis (2001, 2002) the family care issues seen from the perspective of the women's labor market

participation were clearly part of this agenda as well as equal opportunities (Lewis, 2006). Since 2004, when the two CEE countries analyzed in this paper joined the EU, the EU together with the OECD has put pressure on these new member countries to increase female employment rates and this pressure has become according to Szikra and Győry (2014: p. 9) an important “exogenous driver for family policy reforms”, also in the form of paid parental leave reform. Regarding the convergence of social policy we can, according to Van Vliet (2010), find convergence of policy objectives that can eventually lead also to the convergence of policy instruments and their designs, as for example the mechanisms of EES focus on these instruments, too. Saxonberg (2014) claims that the influence of the EU is present mainly in the positive discourse on gender and feminism and in CEE the success of the EU lies primarily in forcing these countries to also give fathers the same rights as mothers regarding parental leave benefits. Similarly, EU forced CEE countries to grant women the right to get back their jobs after they return from parental leave (Saxonberg, 2014). Even despite this fact, Saxonberg (2014) concludes after some interviews with public officials that there is not much effect of the EU in the area of family policy, but rather in terms of influencing the public discourse and its perception of gender and gender equality. Even though some quantitative studies have found convergence in social policy, such as Greve (1996) and Bouget (2003), it is still not clear how much of it can be ascribed to the influence of the European Union and not to the global or domestic political dynamics (Van Vliet, 2010). The next part of this thesis therefore looks at the literature concerning the role of domestic actors in reforming family policy, mainly the role of political parties and national governments.

As already noted, the EU thus matters for the policy objectives and design of family policy indirectly through the channels of “soft law” which are based on two discourses: the social investment approach and the transitional labor market model which promote investment in the new social risks, their facilitation and individualization (Knijn & Smit, 2009). The influence

of the EU even if indirect should be present in the legislation through the shift towards one of the above mentioned discourses. For the purpose of my thesis I therefore later on analyze whether the objectives set by the EU and the national governments of Slovakia and Hungary comply with the actual legislation on parental leave in both the examined countries and whether there is convergence.

2.3. The role of domestic political actors

After 1989, democratic regimes were established in both Hungary and Slovakia, together with market economy. This change also raised the number of actors that can substantively influence state policies, including family policies. Despite the notion that path dependence played an important role in the transformation process, “liberal reforms have challenged the welfare status quo“, and led to the volatility of the welfare systems (Szikra & Tomka, 2009: p. 29). In Hungary for instance both the socialist-liberal coalition of the middle of the 1990s and the conservative government after 1998 played an important role in shaping the social benefits for young children and mothers. While the former introduced an austerity package that included a cutback on social benefits and the abolishment of universal family allowance (the famous Bokros package of 1995), the latter cancelled some of these retrenchment measures in the late 1990s, what meant also the restoration of the social-insurance based GYED (Szikra & Tomka, 2009; Ferge, 2001; Haney, 2003; Saxonberg, 2014; Inglot et al., 2012). According to Szikra and Tomka (2009: p. 29) the case of Hungary is recognized as a typical example of “the region’s rapidly changing and volatile welfare development“. Ferge (2001) in her study focuses primarily on the third, Fidesz-led Hungarian government’s social and family policy

after 1989, which followed the political line of prioritizing the better-off. Social integration together with the values of solidarity and distributive justice were therefore missing from the Hungarian public policy in her opinion (Ferge, 2001). In the case of Slovakia, according to Saxonberg (2014), the party-political division has not played an important role, the changes made either by center-right governments or leftist governments were rather small and these governments acted differently than would be expected from their ideologies. Only the Christian Democrats (KDH) with their support for one week paternity leave and their support for traditional family are in line with their expected ideology, but still have done little in practice, especially when it comes to paid parental leave (Saxonberg, 2014). According to Bednárík (2012) the pre-accession family policy in Slovakia tested the relationship between the state and the family, including the extent to which the state can support families. Saxonberg (2014) argues that we can observe only small changes in family policies in Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and the Czech Republic that could be ascribed to political actors and therefore he claims that the role of party ideology does not seem to matter for post-socialist family policy adaptations.

Morgan (2013), on the other hand, analyzed the effect of the electoral competition on the work-family policies in three Western European countries, namely Germany, the UK, and the Netherlands. She found that the structural changes also influenced the partisan politics in a sense that the breadwinner model was abandoned by all political parties, including center-right conservative ones, and these countries started to introduce policies that help facilitating work and family life, even though they did not fully adopt the Nordic model (Morgan, 2013). The path shift is therefore, however, only apparent in some areas of work-family policies such as childcare, parental leave and working time flexibilization (Morgan, 2013). She claims that the reason for such a policy shift is that parties find themselves competing for women's votes more than in the past (Morgan, 2013). As women are now more likely to work than not, the

policies which facilitate motherhood and paid work climb on parties' agendas and crawl into party manifestos across the political spectrum (Morgan, 2013). However, there is no study that would confirm that the same happened in the case of the CEE countries.

Makszin (2013) in her dissertation in which she focuses on the four Visegrad countries finds that after the fall of communism, even though the political parties had consistent approaches to family policy, the partisan explanation of welfare reform is not effective in explaining the direction of the reform. What rather explains the content of welfare reforms is the coherence of the governments in the case of Slovakia, but this dynamic is less clear in the case of Hungary (Makszin, 2013). In Hungary the patterns of coalition formation created coherent conservative governments that promoted more extensive family policy than the less coherent socialist-liberal governments, which were not able to reverse these reforms (Makszin, 2013). On the other hand, the coherence in the case of Slovakia meant that left-wing governments increased the generosity of family benefits, and right-wing governments decreased it, but extended the length of the parental leave (Makszin, 2013). She also finds that the parental leave policy is therefore fluctuating over time due to the color of the incumbent government (Makszin, 2013). In conclusion, Makszin (2013: p. 109) finds the role of right- and left-wing parties regarding the party direction of reforms "muddled" as it varies across countries.

Saxonberg (2014), similarly, examines the role of the political parties, and finds that in the Visegrad countries radical changes were not carried out, but the political parties have made certain adjustments in the field of family policy. The lack of radical changes can be ascribed to the communist legacy in family policies that remained popular even after the fall of the communist regime and also to the fact that these policies were not given priority (Saxonberg, 2014). Even in the case of Hungary where family policy was given a higher priority, however, no radical changes were carried out in the early years of democratization (Saxonberg, 2014). As Saxonberg (2014) notes, family policies in the region have not changed much since 1989,

even despite the fact that there were various coalition governments in power since then. Still, we can find adjustments in parental leave policy in Slovakia and Hungary that serve very similar aims – to encourage mothers to return to work sooner (Saxonberg, 2014). The two examined countries gave during the examined period a different priority to family policy, and were ruled by ideologically different parties. However, only in Hungary there was a short period between 1995 and 1998 when the parental leave policy diverged from the developmental path. It therefore seems that the differences in party politics cannot explain the shifts in similar direction in the provision of parental leave in the recent years.

Hungary that has a long history of having the most generous family policy still remains a leader in this sense (Inglot et al., 2012). While the conservative family policy of the Orbán government (1998-2002) was “segmented according to social class” (Inglot et al., 2012: p. 33), the second socialist government introduced a turn towards social-democratic universalism. In general, the socialists tried to reduce the long parental leaves twice, but both times (in 1996 and 2009) the successor Orbán government restored them (Szikra, 2014). The Gyurcsány government (2004-2009) also introduced a law that allowed women receiving GYES to work full time after their child reaches its first birthday in order to increase women’s employment (Inglot et al., 2012). Under the second Orbán government (2010-2014), the three-year flat-rate GYES was restored (cut in 2009 by the minority Bajnai government) and the possibility to work while receiving GYES was limited to 30 hours (Inglot et al., 2012; Szikra, 2014). On the other hand, “family policy has not been much of an issue” in Slovakia after 1989 (Saxonberg, 2014: p. 239). The Mečiar government (until 1992 and from December 1994 to 1998) and the short-term coalition government of Jozef Moravčík (1992-1994) made only small changes, mainly in childcare allowances (Saxonberg, 2014). The second center-right government of Mikuláš Dzurinda introduced a small parental-leave benefit for fathers to assist mothers during the first month after the birth of a child in 2003,

but as only few fathers made a use of it, the government cancelled it in 2005 (Saxonberg, 2014). In 2006 the social-democratic party SMER formed a populist nationalist coalition with Mečiar's HZDS and the Slovak National Party. This government introduced legislation that allows parents to return to work before the child reaches the age of three and using part of the parental allowance for private childcare, following so the earlier law by the second Dzurinda government to keep the parental allowance while also earning up to about €40 per month (Saxonberg, 2014: p. 240). According to Saxonberg (2014) even if making some changes to family policies, no parties advocate family policies that are in line with their professed party ideology.

Based on the literature presented here, none of it gives a clear picture whether domestic political actors matter for the political changes in family policies and, if so, how exactly. In the case of Slovakia and Hungary, however, rather the role of conservative, right-wing governments seems to be more important than the role of socialist, left-wing parties and governments. Therefore I focus primarily on the role of the EU as the factor that could cause the path shift in parental leave policy in Slovakia and Hungary in the same direction.

2.4. Parental leave in Slovakia and Hungary now

In this section I give a brief overview of the current state of the parental leave policy in both the examined countries. What make the parental leave in Slovakia and Hungary similar now are especially the eligibility conditions and the length of the leave. Table 1 provides an overview of the current parental leave policy design in the two countries, including the length, cash benefit level, flexibility and eligibility associated with the benefit. In the case of the

Hungarian GYES (Gyermekgondozási segély) as well as in the case of the Slovak “rodičovská dovolenka”, both parents are eligible to take this parental leave until the child reaches the age of three (Gerbery, 2014; Korintus, 2014). Both countries also allow the parents to work while receiving a flat-rate benefit. One difference is that in the Hungarian case, the parents have the option of returning to work after the first birthday of their child, whereas in the case of Slovakia it is possible to receive parental benefit and work part time or full time for the entire duration of the leave (Korintus, 2014; Gerbery 2014).

Also the generosity of the universal parental leave differs between these two countries. The amount of GYES is equal to the amount of the minimum old-age pension per month (in 2014 it amounted to 94 EUR) (Korintus, 2014). However, in the case of Hungary there is also a possibility to take the income-related, shorter GYED (Gyermekgondozási díj), which is only accessible for insured parents from the end of the maternity leave until the child reaches the age of two and equals “70 per cent of average daily earnings, up to a ceiling of 70 per cent of twice the minimum daily wage” per month (Korintus, 2014: p. 3). In Slovakia there is only one kind of parental leave that comes with a universal, flat-rate parental allowance (“rodičovský príspevok”). This parental allowance is available to all families. The parental allowance is a flat-rate payment that is somewhat higher than GYES in Hungary –at 203.20 Euros per month (Gerbery, 2014). However, similarly as in the Hungarian case, this amount is not sufficient to be a long-term replacement of a wage.

When it comes to the objectives of the parental leave policy, the second Orbán government (2010-2014) claimed to give mothers a “greater choice” and “new opportunity” in work/family reconciliation (Inglot et al., 2012: p. 35), not only by allowing women to work while receiving GYES, but also through the flexibilization of childcare policies. There was, similarly, a flexibilization of parental leave in the case of Slovakia, when the Smer government (2006-2010) made it possible for the parent on parental leave to return to work

while still receiving the parental allowance (Saxonberg, 2006). According to Michoń (2015: p. 194-195), Visegrad countries still follow “a ‘familialistic’ model with a combination of negative and positive familialism”, because they provide paid parental leave and at the same time they promote the care for young children to be done by the family as there are limited childcare service possibilities. Even though the Slovakian Law on Parental Allowance states that the cash benefit is designed to ensure proper childcare, it is not sufficient to cover the basic needs of the caring parent and the baby. The benefit level of 203.20 Euros that is adjusted based on the level of the life minimum is, according to the findings of the international project Living Wage, not sufficient to cover the basic needs as the minimal cost of basic needs in Slovakia in 2014 was 250 Euros per month (Kollárová, 2014). That means that this cash benefit is not sufficient to ensure proper childcare if it is not supported by another income. Similarly, in Hungary, where according to the results of the same project the minimal cost of basic needs in 2014 was about 177 Euros (54 700 HUF)¹, the universal flat-rate cash benefit of 94 Euros (28 500 HUF) would not cover even half of this cost. Even though in Hungary there is also an income-based GYED available, there were only 35.1 recipients per thousand women of fertile age (81 839), in comparison with the flat-rate GYES that had twice as many recipients in 2012, meaning 72.1 recipients per thousand women of fertile age (168 037) (Korintus, 2014). This means that if the recipients are women, they can either rely on their husband in providing for them, or return to work and search for a childcare service or delegate the care for the child to another family member. Michoń (2015) also argues that promoting gender equality does not seem to be an objective of parental leave policy in the Visegrad countries, with about 1% of male recipients of leave payments in Hungary (Bencsik & Juhász, 2012) and a similar proportion of male recipients of parental allowance in Slovakia in 2011 (Gerbery, 2014).

¹Calculated on May 27th 2015: 1 EUR = 308.8 HUF (nbs.sk)

Even though parents have the possibility to work part-time when still on leave, part-time jobs are for most employees acceptable only for a short period of time, while according to Blasko (2009) they are also associated with higher wage costs for employers (Michoń, 2015). Moreover, Michoń (2015: p. 193) claims that the Visegrad countries, in general, support women's participation in the labor market and since the 1990s there is change in favor of gender equality, however, "[...] women are being caught in contradictory expectations: between the strong expectation and necessity to work for pay and the strong expectation that they devote themselves to their children in the first years afterbirth". The parental leave and childcare policies that are still strongly familialistic, expecting one of the parents to provide care for the child in the early years, therefore, still reflect and help in reproducing the image of the woman-caretaker and man-breadwinner and the design of the parental leave policy does not encourage fathers to make use of it (Michoń, 2015).

Table 1 – The Design of Parental Leave Policy in Slovakia and Hungary in 2014

<i>Parental leave</i>	Slovakia	Hungary
Length	3 years	GYES – 3 years GYED – until child's 2nd birthday (after the end of maternity leave, for insured parents)
Benefit level	Flat-rate (€203.20/month)	GYES - Flat-rate (€94/month) GYED – 70% of average daily earnings (up to €467/month)
Flexibility	Part time or full time work	GYES & GYED – Unlimited working hours after the child's 1st birthday
Eligibility	Provision of regular care Only one parent Residence or temporary stay in Slovak Republic	GYES – a parent or a guardian GYED – only the mother up to the child's 1st birthday; or either of the parents employed for at least 365 days within the two years before the birth of the child (after the first year); or women who completed 2 semesters at a state accredited higher education institution within 2 years before the birth of the child
Stated objective	To ensure proper childcare	To promote the social security of families and to reduce the financial burden of child rearing

Sources: (1) Gerbery, D: Slovak Republic country note. In: Moss, P. (ed.): International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2014. Available at: http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp_and_r_reports/; (2) Korintus, M.: Hungary country note. In: Moss, P. (ed.): International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2014. Available at: http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp_and_r_reports/; (3) Hungarian Family Support Act (Act LXXXIV. of 1998); (4) Slovakian Law on Parental Allowance (571/2009)

2.5. Summary

This chapter served to outline different explanations of the development of parental leave policy, and family policy in general, in the CEE countries. First, I discussed the historical institutionalist explanation that sees path dependence and the legacies of the inter-war and communist regimes as the main reasons why family policies developed in a certain way, with implications for family policy design today. Path dependence and entrenched historical legacies explain why there were no radical changes in the development of family policy in the last 25 years. However, there were certain small adjustments that led to a shift in the objectives and design of parental leave policy. There are therefore certain similarities in the provision of parental leave in both countries now that are most probably leaning towards the objectives of the European Union to activate women. The role of the governments can be on the other hand more apparent in terms of the differences that are mainly present regarding the generosity and the groups targeted by the parental leave policy. However, there is no evidence that domestic political actors, mainly political parties and party ideology, play any role in this path shifting in the two examined countries. Therefore the regime change in 1989 also cannot be considered as a critical juncture (see also Saxonberg 2014). The influence of the EU seems to give a better explanation for the development of parental leave policy in CEE countries and the occurring similarity, especially over the last decade. This influence is mainly indirect, in the form of strategies and recommendations.

The purpose of this work is to analyze the legislation on parental leave provision after 1989 and to find out why it changed in a certain way in the two examined countries. In order to do so therefore I also take into consideration the possible influence of the European Union. In the next section I focus on the methods and research design used in this thesis to analyze the

development of the parental leave provision in Slovakia and Hungary based on the available legislative documents for the period between 1989 and 2014.

3. Research design

In this chapter I discuss the research design, case selection, the choice of primary data to be analyzed and the methods of the analysis. The chapter is divided into three sections. First, I discuss the case selection. Second, I discuss the methods for analyzing political objectives. In this section I primarily focus on the methods of critical discourse analysis. Finally, I set the framework for the analysis of policy design.

3.1. Case selection

Central Eastern European countries used to be treated as one block of countries with identical welfare regimes (Glass & Fodor, 2007; Haney, 2003). They are generally characterized by two basic types of paid leave: maternity leave and parental leave (Saxonberg & Sirovátka, 2006). The former is insurance based and is available only to mothers for the first few months of the child's life, as a medical leave. In contrast, the latter is, in general, a flat-rate benefit available for a longer period of time and is geared towards enabling parents to care for their young children (Saxonberg & Sirovátka, 2006). Despite some similarities, in terms of the pro-natalist goals and the tools of family policy, the CEE countries differed to some extent also during the communist regime. Parental leave policy in Slovakia and Hungary differed mainly in its generosity since the communist rule (Kocourková, 2002; Saxonberg, 2014; Saxonberg & Sirovátka, 2006). The post-communist Slovakian parental allowance benefits, even though universal, are flat-rate payments which according to Saxonberg and Sirovátka (2006) follow a re-familization logic. On the other hand, the post-communist Hungarian government kept the two-year income- and insurance-based parental leave, the GYED, which amounts to 70% of

the daily wage earned prior to birth (although capped at 70% of twice the minimum wage), as well as the flat-rate three year benefit (GYES) (Saxonberg & Sirovátka, 2006).

Parental leave, however, changed in the last couple of years in terms of eligibility and flexibility. While before 1989 it was designed to keep mothers out of the labor market, now besides allowing fathers to take parental leave, it also allows for certain flexibility in terms of either part-time or full-time work while still receiving GYES in the case of Hungary and parental allowance in the case of Slovakia. Therefore the main reason why I chose these two CEE countries is that the parental leave policy now seems to be more and more similar than we would expect these to be if we followed the historical institutionalist explanation of path dependent, difference-preserving development. The cases of Hungary and Slovakia are primarily interesting not only because of their common history, but because of the present changes that are bringing them closer. In the case of Slovakia, there are also few studies that would include this country in a comparative study of family policies, and specifically parental leave policy. There are economic and institutional legacies of the communist past present in both the examined countries, however, these are not able to explain a slight shift in a same direction in parental leave policy. Therefore factors that would drive a shift need to be examined. In this case I focus primarily on the role of the EU because of its clear activation strategies and the promotion of gender equality as both Slovakia and Hungary joined the EU in 2004. The main focus of this thesis is on policy objectives and policy design as parts of the policy instrument of parental leave. These two aspects of parental leave policy show us what the outcome of the political process is and with what incentives it might have been created. If we want to know why and how parental leave changes over time, policy objectives and policy design can give an answer, especially when using critical content analysis on which I focus in the next section.

3.2. Policy objectives

In order to analyze the objectives of the parental leave throughout the examined period, I use critical discourse analysis of the available legislation on parental leave policy in Slovakia and Hungary. Critical discourse analysis as defined by Wodak and Fairclough (1997) sees “language as social practice“ and understands discourse as “relatively stable uses of language serving the organization and structuring of social life“ (Wodak & Meyer, 2009: p. 5-6; Wodak, 2002). This kind of analysis focuses mainly on “objects of inquiry” (Wodak, 2002: p. 11). According to Fairclough and Kress (1993), the critical account of discourse requires a theorization together with the description of “the social processes and structures, which give rise to the production of a text, and of the social structures and processes within which individuals or groups as social-historical subjects, create meanings in their interaction with texts” (Wodak, 2002: p. 12). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is interested in various research agendas, but in general it can be characterized as (Wodak& Meyer, 2009: p. 10):

“being fundamentally interested in analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language. In other words, CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, constituted, legitimized, and so on, by language use (or in discourse).”

When it comes to the analysis of documents such as legislation, Bacchi (1999) and her “What’s the problem?” approach recommends us to examine the policy proposals together with actual policy instruments, usually found in policy documents and legislation. Behind every legislative document there is a certain aim of what it should achieve even if it is not directly stated. Critical discourse analysis allows the analysis to go beyond the officially stated objectives and draw conclusions about the aims of the legislation by looking at the language used in the laws and the design of the policy instrument. Furthermore, according to Olsen (1985), whether the government issues legislation or not, can be seen as a form of intervention. For example, not supporting childcare services can be also a form of intervention

because it affects the lives of people (Bacchi, 1999). Bacchi (1999) also stresses the importance of the timing when an issue comes to the agenda. Using critical discourse analysis in analyzing legislation and policy proposals, essentially, tells us how a certain issue is framed (Bacchi, 1999).

One example of the use of critical discourse analysis is Bacchi's research on child care policy, in which case its main purpose is to "examine how endorsements of a reform carry problem representations, which have particular effects" (Bacchi, 1999: p. 130). She argues that the narrative that often follows the gender equality debate in the EU is, based on the analysis of Duncan (1996), not determined by childcare as a variable in the employment of women (Bacchi, 1999). Moreover, even though feminists try to draw attention to the unequal division of unpaid work as part of domestic responsibilities, the narrative of "releasing women to work" is still dominant (Bacchi, 1999: p. 132). Therefore any debate concerning childcare seems to be tying the need for either childcare services or a reform of paid parental leave to women's labor market participation (Bacchi, 1999). Bacchi (1999: p. 147) claims that in case the funding of childcare is tied to labor market participation, there is a desire for the independence and self-sufficiency of women, but when the subsidies are means-tested the representation of the problem is "[...] the need to get poor single women and poor women generally off welfare and into the labor force, while rescuing children 'at risk'".

I use critical discourse analysis in order to find out how the objectives of the parental leave policy are framed, i.e. what these objectives are said to be, in the two examined countries, Slovakia and Hungary. The documents analyzed in this thesis are primarily the pieces of legislation regarding parental leave policy for the studied period (1989-2014) and how these comply (or not) with the strategies and recommendations of the European Union as regards

the policy instrument under scrutiny. First of all, I look for objectives that are explicitly stated in the legislation. Next, I look at the language used in the legislation, more specifically what words are used. Here the main focus is on such words as mother, parent, childcare, work, and the context they are used in. The focus is on making explicit the assumptions that are implicit through the use of particular formulations rather than others. The aim is to determine why the laws state what they state, what the political intention behind the particular formulations used is.

3.3. Policy design

The design of the parental leave policy and how it changed during the period between 1989 and 2014 in Slovakia and Hungary is another aspect of this policy I analyze in my thesis. In general, social policy determines the consequences and forms of care in society (Daly & Rake, 2003). The way in which welfare states respond to the need for care, in general, has according to Daly and Rake (2003) three dimensions: services, time and financial support. In the case of the care for young children more specifically, it is especially important how the welfare state provides resources in order to enable people to provide care in private life (Daly & Rake, 2003). In the case of such employment-related measure as parental leave, Daly and Rake (2003) argue that what matters most is whether such leave is paid or unpaid, and also how generous it is in terms of both the duration of the leave and the payment. Regarding the duration of the leave they also point out the variation among countries when parental leave is combined with maternity leave (Daly & Rake, 2003). While the former can be available either to mothers only or to both parents to take care of young children, and is therefore considered as longer, the latter is strictly designed for mothers, to enable post-partum recovery and

because of the need for breastfeeding and is, as a result, somewhat shorter (Szelewa & Polakowski, 2008). Morgan and Zippel (2003) further differentiate between two kinds of paid parental leave based on differences in design. They define *parental leave* in Western Europe as paid as a percentage of previous income and shorter in comparison to *care leave*, which is characterized by not very generous, most often flat-rate payments and time-generous, between two to three years (Morgan & Zippel, 2003). Similarly, Szelewa and Polakowski (2008) focus in their study in the case of parental leave policy on its generosity in terms of the level of payment and its duration together with the universality of the leave. Szelewa and Polakowski (2008: p. 119) understand under the universality of benefits “the conditions under which the parental benefit is granted to the eligible parents”. They differentiate between three types of benefits: universal (which are granted on the basis of citizenship or residence), selective (based on insurance), and residual (eligibility for which is means- or income-tested) (Szelewa & Polakowski, 2008).

In order to analyze the design of parental leave in Slovakia and Hungary I, therefore, focus on the generosity in terms of the duration and payment of the leave and the parental benefit connected with it, as well as the eligibility criteria for the parental benefit and thus the universality of the leave. I also add the element of flexibility which is important for the possibility of work and family reconciliation and means, therefore, whether the beneficiaries are also able to work while still receiving parental care benefits.

4. Analysis of Legislation

In this chapter I analyze the legislation on parental leave in Slovakia and Hungary and compare its development from 1989 to 2014 in the two countries. In the case of Slovakia the length, the benefit level, the eligibility and the flexibility of the parental leave is regulated by the Labor Code and the Law on Parental Allowance. The benefit level is, nevertheless, adjusted annually since 2004 based on the so-called ‘life minimum’ of the Regulation of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic. In Hungary I focused on the universal, three-year GYES benefit, which is primarily regulated by Act XLVIII of 1995 on amendments to certain laws in order to achieve economic stabilization and the Family Support Act (Act LXXXIV of 1998). While the former was effective only for 2 years, the latter is effective until now, although with amendments. Because of the lack of time and space I did not include the income-tested GYED benefit, which is also received by a significantly smaller number of women than GYES. Figure 1 below gives an overview of the most important changes in the legislation on parental leave and parental allowance/childcare help (GYES) in Slovakia and Hungary since 1989.

The analysis is divided into three parts: the period between 1989 and 1996, the period between 1996 and 2004, and the period after 2004. The first period starts with the change of communist regimes and ends with the first important legislative changes issued in both countries. The most important change occurred in Hungary during this initial post-1989 period, where GYES became means-tested as of January 1996. The second period is marked mainly by the preparation of EU accession in 2004 that started in the late 1990s. This period is also marked by important changes of governments in both countries in 1998. Finally, the last period starts in the year Slovakia and Hungary joined the EU, and ends with the most recent legislative changes. The changes that occurred since 1989 are primarily changes in

eligibility and flexibility in both countries, the length of the period when the benefit of parental allowance or GYES can be received has not changed and over the analyzed time it remained three years. The objective of the parental leave or the related cash benefit is, however, not always stated therefore, the analysis of the objectives is based on the language used in the legislation, and the design of the provision of the paid parental leave itself.

Figure 1 - The most important legislation on parental leave policy between 1989 and 2014



4.1. The 1989-1996 period

The first period analyzed is the one immediately after the collapse of the communist regimes, characterized, in general, by the period of austerity measures. Perhaps not surprisingly, little changed regarding the provision of paid parental leave in terms of policy objectives or, indeed, policy instrument design. In the case of Hungary the provision of GYES was universal and, therefore, in comparison to GYED, which remains insurance based, even if people lost their jobs, e.g. as a consequence of decreasing employment, they could still be eligible for this benefit (Gábos, 2000). The GYES benefit was already available to both of the parents, the mother as well as the father, since 1985 (Saxonberg, 2014), and it was available to parents until their children reached the age of three.

In Hungary, the first bigger changes came in 1995, when the so called ‘Bokros package’ was introduced by the incumbent socialist government, which also contained significant changes to the family support system (Gábos, 2000; Ferge, 2001; Haney, 1997). Act XLVIII of 1995 on amendments to certain laws in order to achieve economic stabilization introduced mostly changes to the universal family allowance, but also GYES and GYED. The biggest change regarding paid parental leave was that GYES became means-tested, while the insurance-based GYED was completely phased out. Besides making GYES means-tested, the new law also allowed parents receiving GYES to engage in earning activities after the child reached the age of 18 months, but at the same time this benefit was terminated in case the child was placed in a day-care center. Even though parents now had the option to work after the child turned 18 months old, the regulation of no benefit in case using a nursery significantly limited the available alternatives of care for the child. According to the data of the Central Statistical Office, in 1996, the average amount of GYES for one person equaled 9 450 HUF per month.²

²Approximately 30.60 EUR based on the conversion 1 EUR = 308.9 HUF from May 31st 2015 as calculated on nbs.sk

In comparison, the compulsory minimum wage, based on the data of the Ministry of Employment Policy and Labor in the same year was 14 500 HUF (Bálint, 2013). One of the objectives of this reform was supposed to be the reduction of income inequality, as the households receiving family benefits were on average poorer than the non-receiving households (Gábos, 2000). The need for retrenchment was the main reason why such radical measures were introduced in 1995. Because of their low popularity (Saxonberg, 2014; Haney, 2003) and the fact that the new government in 1998 reintroduced GYED and made GYES universal again, the development of the parental leave continued on the same path as before the 1995 Bokros package.

In the case of Slovakia, in the early 1990s we can similarly see path-dependent changes that built on policy developments before the collapse of the communist regime. Slovakia in the early 1990s was still part of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, until January 1st 1993, when the two countries split. The changes to family policy in the two years after the collapse of the regime were therefore still carried out by the federal government. The changes came by the introduction of the Law on Parental Allowance (382/1990). The length of the paid parental leave was set to 3 years and the benefit level amounted to 900 Kčs (Czechoslovak crowns). For comparison, the minimum wage in Czechoslovakia at that time amounted to 2000 Kčs and the minimum old age pension in the case of a person living alone amounted to 1200 Kčs (Barošová, 2014). The provision of parental allowance was universal, however, only one parent without a full-time job could become its recipient. This suggests that the recipients of parental allowance were kept out of the labor market for three years during which they received this cash benefit. If the recipient of the parental allowance wanted to work, he/she could do so, but only for two hours a day or for an income not exceeding 800 Kčs. If the parent receiving the parental allowance decided to work for the allowed two hours a day, the care of the child during its first three years could not be delegated to an institution such as a

nursery or a kindergarten, but solely to another person (e.g. a grandparent). Similarly, as in the case of Hungary, this regulation limited the options of alternative care and minimized the incentives of women to return to work if they did not have a relative who could take care of the child. As stated in the law, all these regulations were supposed “to improve the conditions of families caring for small children” (§1 of the Law on Parental Allowance 382/1990). However, with the increasing unemployment rate that rose from 1.6 percent in 1990 to 11.8 percent in 1991 (Slovak National Bank, 1994) we can also assume that the regulation of limited work hours and wage as well as limited access to daycare also served to keep women as the main caretakers at home by not giving them real incentives to work, and on the other hand the role of the men as main earners remained unchanged.

The changes made in 1990 also included the abolishment of the term ‘maternity leave’ (in essence meaning extended maternity leave, i.e. care leave), and the introduction of the term parental leave in the Amendment to the Labor Code of 1990 (published as Law nr. 3/1991). This made the parental leave more gender neutral, but did not increase the number of men taking parental leave. After Slovakia became an independent country, solely one Amendment was made to the original Law on Parental Allowance from 1990, making the benefit level of the allowance dependent on the level of the so-called subsistence minimum, meaning that the parental allowance since 1996 has been equal to 1.6 times the subsistence minimum. This change, nonetheless, did not change substantially the value of the cash benefit and still served only as a minimum support for child rearing and not as wage substitute. However, as Bednárík (2012) also claims, family policy was not one of the priorities of the governments of the newly independent Slovak Republic and therefore we can see only few changes, all of which are, however, in line with the previous policies.

The period between 1989 and 1998 shows certain differences in the provision of paid parental leave in Slovakia and Hungary, mainly because of the period of two years during which the

means-tested GYES was introduced by the socialist Hungarian government. It is, however, only a short-term discontinuity, reversed in 1998. The new law issued in 1998 therefore means a return to the path of a parental leave policy that was started in both countries well before 1989 and meant that the provision of care for the children is mainly in the hands of the mother until the child reaches the age of three, and so reinforces the female caretaker/male breadwinner model. This path-dependent development continued in Slovakia also because priorities were not given to family policies in the early 1990s. Even though in Hungary, on the other hand, family policy was in the interest of the post-communist governments, the lack of public support caused the return to the previous arrangements of parental leave. The regulation that allowed parents in Hungary to work after the child reached the age of 18 months, or the regulation that allowed Slovakian parents to work two hours a day or earn not even half the amount of the minimum wage, but without the right to use childcare services when at work did not serve the objective of “pushing” women into the labor market, but quite the opposite. There are probably more reasons behind the familializing policies of the 1990s such as the lack of public childcare services for children under three that would allow women to return to work together with the worsening economic situation and rising unemployment. Essentially this way the women were kept out of the labor market that was struggling with lack of job opportunities and at the same time there was no need to expand childcare facilities.

4.2. The 1996-2004 period

The second period of time did not bring many changes in the Hungarian family support system in terms of changes to the GYES, but at the same time the law that is effective until now was issued. The reform of the Hungarian socialist government in 1995 was not effective

for long as the new Orbán-led conservative government that came to power in 1998 introduced the so-called Family Support Act (Act LXXXIV of 1998) that made GYES universal again, and re-introduced GYED. The length of the universal parental leave remained unchanged, and there were small changes in terms of language used also in the previous legislation. Regarding eligibility, since 1998 the terms mother and father were changed to parents, and foster parents and guardians also became eligible for this benefit. Regarding flexibility, the parents were not allowed to engage in earning activities until the child reached the age of 18 months, but after this period they could work for a maximum of four hours a day, or unlimited hours if the work was done in the household where the child was raised. This is, however, only an nominal change and mothers still remained the primary target population of parental leave policy (Ferge, 2001; Michoń, 2015). The data on the percentage of people working in a part-time job show that overall 3.8 per cent of working people worked part time in 1998, with only 2.3 per cent of men of the working population (Seres, 2011). The percentage of women working part-time was more than twice as much – 5.5 –, but still below the EU average which was in 1991 26.7 per cent (Seres, 2011). The atypical working arrangements were (and still are) simply more costly for the employer (Michoń, 2015). This law also includes a stated objective which is “to promote the social security of families and reduce the financial burden of child rearing” (§1 of The Family Support Act, LXXXIV of 1998). With the cash benefit of 13 700 HUF (approximately 44 EUR)³, however, only the second part of this statement can be considered as the real objective. The new design of GYES consisting of the universal low cash benefit and the possibility of part-time work only after the child reaches the age of 18 months was basically a continuation of existing policy legacies, an essentially path-dependent development that was interrupted by the ‘Bokros package’.

³Calculated on June 6th 2015: 1 EUR = 311.28 HUF (nbs.sk)

The second piece of legislation of this period is the Amendment to the Family Support Act (Act XII of 2001) that makes grandparents also eligible for the GYES after the child reaches the age of one, and if the care of the child happens in the household of the parents. This suggests that child care was still supposed to happen at home, was very much seen as familial (and possibly feminized) and gave limited choices to women in combining work and care for children considering labor market realities at the time.

Since 1993 the EU started to use the concept of work and family reconciliation also in its labor market policy mainly in the context of the flexibilization of labor markets (Stratigaki, 2004). According to Stratigaki (2004), in the second half of the 1990s the objective of the reconciliation of work and family life was included in most of the major EU policy documents on employment. The most important of these documents are the Fourth Medium Term Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (1996-2000), the 1996 directive on parental leave and the European Employment Strategy of 1998 (Stratigaki, 2004; Knijn & Smit, 2009). The former included as one of its objectives “combining work with household/family life for women and men” (Stratigaki, 2004: p. 47), while the latter’s objective was the “reconciliation of parental and professional responsibilities for working parents” (Stratigaki, 2004: p. 47). According to Stratigaki (2004: p. 48) the directive was adopted because of “[...] increasing need for flexibility in the labor market rather than a need to reinforce gender equality in the labor market”. The directive set the duration of the leave to three months, the entitlement for parents of children up to eight years, but the decision on pay and social security remained in the hands of the member states. As both Hungary and Slovakia applied for accession in 1994 and 1995, respectively, and with

Hungary starting the negotiations in 1998⁴, we can expect the EU policy documents to have an effect also on the candidate countries that needed to comply with the EU legislation. The discourse of the reconciliation of work and family life on EU level thus could lead to greater flexibility in terms of the possible delegation of care and the possibility to combine paid parental leave with part-time work.

In Slovakia new legislation was introduced in the period between 2001 and 2003, including a new a new Labor Code (2001) and a new Law on Parental Allowance (2002). The length remained again unchanged, and the benefit level continued to follow the indexation based on the subsistence minimum. Even though in the new laws only one parent was again eligible for the cash benefit for the reference child, an unpaid parental leave could be – according to the Amendment to the Labor Code (210/2003) in 2003 – demanded by both a woman and a man. The word ‘or’, which implied that only one of the parents was eligible for unpaid parental leave was replaced by the word “and” that now suggested that both parents were at the same time eligible for unpaid parental leave. This, however, does hardly mean that both parents could in reality at the same time take time off work as only one parent remained eligible for a low flat-rate parental allowance. Another important change was also made in terms of the protection of the employment contract of the person on parental leave who now could not be made redundant while being on parental leave. Moreover, according to the Amendment of the Law on Parental Allowance (208/2002) the care for a child was during the time of receiving parental allowance limited only to the care by one of the parents, who could delegate care to another person, but not an institution, such as a nursery or a kindergarten.

⁴ Source: The 2004 enlargement: the challenge of a 25-member EU – Available at: http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/enlargement/2004_and_2007_enlargement/e50017_en.htm (Accessed on June 6th 2015)

The changes of the legislation between 2001 and 2003 brought Slovakia and Hungary closer together in terms of the objective to keep the care of young children restricted to one of the parents in the first three years of the child's life, with clear disincentives to use formal childcare during this period, even on a part-time basis. At the same time, however, the cash benefit based on the minimum old age pension in Hungary and on the subsistence level in Slovakia do not give incentives for men to make use of parental leave, the effects of which are visible even today. The changes made in this period and the shift towards an at least formally more flexible provision of parental leave benefit in both countries can be therefore explained by the influence of the EU. Hungary started the negotiations on the accession in 1998, while Slovakia only in 2000, after a center-right government replaced the Mečiar government with an authoritarian style of governing. Both countries, even though they joined the EU only in 2004, had to comply with the EU legislation what could explain the similarities in legislation that occurred in this period.

4.3. The period after 2004

In 2004 both Slovakia and Hungary joined the European Union. This last section, therefore, analyzes the period after 2004 and intends to reveal whether the legislation on parental leave might have been affected by the EU ever since also. In Hungary the first legislative changes in the field of family policy after accession came in 2005, when the Act CXXVI on the transformation of the family support system was issued. This law represents an important change especially for the flexibility of the use of GYES, as it allows unlimited working hours while the eligible parent (or the grandparent) can still receive the full cash benefit of 24 700

HUF (approximately 80 EUR)⁵ after the child reaches the age of 1. This was, however, changed again in 2010, when the number of working hours a recipient of GYES can work and still receive the cash benefit was limited to thirty hours per week after the child reaches the age of 1. Unlimited hours are allowed only if the recipient works at home, or if the child for which the recipient receives the benefit is disabled (Act CLXXI of 2010 amending certain acts on social and child protection, family support, disability and employment). The unlimited number of hours the recipient of GYES can work after the child reaches the age of 1 has been changed back only recently from the limited thirty hours per week, in 2013, through Act CCXXIV of 2013 on the transformation of childcare benefits and on the exemptions from the payment of the social contribution tax. The level of benefit in the 2004-2014 period has also been affected by the unchanged amount of the minimum old age pension. The design of the paid parental leave policy gives therefore mixed signals to women. On one hand it gives them the opportunity to return to work after their child reaches the age of 1, but on the other hand the options for care during the first years of the child's life are limited strictly to the care of relatives who are most probably grandmothers receiving GYES while also receiving their pension. The flexibilization of paid parental leave is therefore partly in line with the EU objectives, however, we can still identify the strength of historical legacies that are present mainly in mothers' primary role as caretakers and fathers as breadwinners, but also in the diminished role of public childcare services for children under three years.

The flexibility of parental leave was affected also by the new Labor Code (Act I. of 2012), which states that the employer is obliged to cut the working hours of an employee who requests so, until his/her child reaches the age of 3. In other words, Hungary introduced the statutory right of employees to ask for shorter working hours, reflecting EU-wide policy recommendations (Stratigaki, 2004). However, the opportunities of part time work are still

⁵Calculated on June 1st 2015: 1 EUR = 309.11 HUF (nbs.sk)

limited. According to Eurostat data, the part-time employment rate in Hungary reached 6.4 per cent in 2014, while the European average in the same year equaled to 20.6 per cent (Eurostat, 2015). Furthermore, the Labor Code also states that the objective of the unpaid parental leave is “to provide childcare” (§128 of the Act I. of 2012) and it also gives more opportunities to parents to combine child rearing with part-time work than before. Since January 1st 2008, however, the amount of the minimum old age pension – the basis for the benefit level of GYES – has stayed constant at 28 500 HUF (National Employment Services, 2014). Nonetheless, according to Pierson (1994), no change in the adjustment of the benefit can also lead to retrenchment. With rising wages, inflation and rising consumer prices, this means that the cash payment associated with the GYES has been eroding since 2008. With the gender pay gap of 18.4 per cent (in 2013), this cash benefit gives little incentives to men to stay on parental leave, and rather makes women stay at home for the first year and then if possible delegate care to a relative and return to work (Eurostat, 2015).

In Slovakia the legislation annually increases the amount of the parental allowance in line with the legally defined subsistence minimum reference value since 2005. According to the 2005 Amendment to the Law on Parental Allowance in Slovakia, this cash benefit is a “state social benefit by which the state helps parents to ensure proper childcare” (§1 of Law 244/2005). With the amount of 203.20 EUR per month (Table 1) this is, however, hardly possible. This care is supported by the state until the child reaches the age of three, but only if the care is done by a person or an institution that does not belong to the state-financed network of nurseries and kindergartens. The new legislation introduced in 2009, at the same time, attempted to keep the parent caring for the child at home for the first years without any chance of receiving parental allowance and working at the same time. The use of childcare services, such as nurseries and kindergartens, was allowed only in the case of a disabled child, or a single/widowed/divorced/disabled parent. The possibility to work, while still receiving

parental allowance, was issued in the Amendment of the Law on Parental Allowance as late as 2010 (513/2010). The last important Amendment to this Law from 2011 (48/2011) further canceled the article based on which the person who receives parental allowance is not allowed to work. It also set conditions under which parental allowance can be cut by 50% and conditions under which it can be increased by 25%. The former regulation is aimed at recipients of parental allowance whose children are not attending school for more than three months. As parental allowance is only available for the first three years of the child's life, the reduction of parental allowance can be present only in families with more children, where the older child/children is/are of compulsory school age. This regulation seems to indirectly target Roma families, who tend to have more than one child and whose children often have problems with school attendance (Salner, 2004). The latter, on the other hand, increases the amount of the parental allowance when two or more children are born at the same time by 25% for each child. Even though parents are currently allowed to work and still receive parental allowance, the options of what to do with the child under three years are limited with a lack of state subsidized daycare centers, and private daycare centers that cost as much as 500 EUR per month in the capital. Therefore, although there is certain flexibilization present, this does not give enough incentives for fathers to take parental leave with a gender pay gap of 19.8 per cent (in 2013), or for women to find a part-time job, which is, similar to Hungary, still costly for employers (part-time employment in Slovakia in 2014 stood at 5.2 per cent) (Eurostat, 2015).

We can observe a continuing trend in the measures taken in the field of eligibility criteria and flexibilization of parental leave policy that are in line with the EU objectives of the reconciliation of work and family life. In both these countries the changes that occurred after 2004 most often dealt with extending the possibility to combine early years care with employment for people on parental leave, as well as with the alternatives of care when they

return to work. These attempts are partly in line with the Lisbon Strategy set for the period 2000-2010, aimed at increasing female employment to 60% by 2010 (57% in 2005), as well as an increase in the availability of childcare to a 33% coverage rate for children under the age of 3 (Ivan-Ungureanu & Marcu, 2006). Similarly, the Strategy for equality between women and men, 2010-2015, issued by the European Commission, promotes the economic independence of women, together with the equal share of responsibilities in running a family (European Commission, 2010). The possibility to combine care responsibilities with paid work seems to be buttressed by this ‘women’s economic independence’ objective coined at the EU level. At the same time the EU also called for more involvement of fathers “as set up in the amended Parental Leave Directive of 2010, which requires Member States to grant at least one month of the leave period on a “non-transferable basis” to the “other” caring parent, which means usually the father” (Szikra & Győry, 2014: p. 9). The take-it-or-lose-it month for the ‘other’ parent has, however, not been included in the Hungarian or Slovakian legislation on paid parental leave. From the legislation on parental leave analyzed in this thesis, however, we can see only the path shift towards the reconciliation of work and family life that is so far not supported by the easier access to childcare services and equal role of both parents in child rearing.

4.4. Summary

The first two periods analyzed in this chapter show that based on the legislation on parental leave and the universal parental allowance in Slovakia and Hungary, there has not been much path-shifting in the 1990s and early 2000s, but we could see a rather a continuation of a path-dependent development. The exception is only the temporary change of GYES into a means-tested benefit in 1995. This short-term change was, nonetheless, reversed because of the

public protests and the change of government in 1998. The reason for the path-dependent development in the first period might be also the situation on the labor market, meaning mainly the rising unemployment and the lack of public as well as private childcare services. However, later on we can observe that parental leave in Slovakia and Hungary shifted towards similar designs and objectives. This development started even before the EU accession of the two countries and continued even more markedly after 2004 when Slovakia and Hungary joined the EU. The flexibilization that is present ever since is in line with the EU strategies and recommendations focusing on the reconciliation of work and family life.

Since 2011 in Slovakia and 2013 in Hungary, when these countries issued legislation in which they allowed recipients of parental allowance and GYES to work unlimited hours without terminating the benefit, the two countries became very similar in terms of the policy design of paid parental leave as well as its objectives. Both countries support child rearing with a universal cash benefit that is, however, not sufficient to be a substitute for a second income for the whole period of the maximum length of the parental leave. When returning to work, therefore, the parents will most probably delegate the responsibility of care on another family member, as the use of childcare services is not supported in either of the analyzed countries. The signals that especially mothers get from the regulation of parental leave are therefore mixed. It, first of all, serves to keep the mother with the child at home as long as possible and make them dependent on the income of their husbands. In other words, mothers' economic autonomy when having small children is not supported in practice. In both countries mothers – as primary caretakers during the early years – are assumed to be economically dependent, most often on their male partners with higher income. The care work they do, while explicitly said to be supported, is done so half-heartedly only. Second, when giving them the opportunity to return to work, their choices are limited. The possibility to combine work and family responsibilities therefore still lies with the mother as the main caretaker.

5. Conclusion

This thesis reveals the main trends in the development of parental leave policy in Slovakia and Hungary since the collapse of communism. There are many possible explanations of what is happening in the field of family policy in Central Eastern Europe. Most scholars suggest that we can see a path-dependent development of family policy in this region that builds on the socialist legacy. However, recently we can see that even though the socialist legacy left behind different systems of family policies, the two examined countries, Slovakia and Hungary, are shifting in a similar direction. The policy instrument of parental leave can influence the gender equality in various ways, either by encouraging mothers to stay out of the labor market, or by giving them incentives to return to work and give fathers the opportunity to also take part in childcare. This is shown mainly in the objectives and design of parental leave policy. Even though the length of the leave and the universality of the cash benefit are stable over time, the change in eligibility criteria as well as the flexibilization of parental leave have occurred recently in both countries. This is mainly caused by the influence of the European Union that changes discourse in the issues of gender equality, and at the same time the need to increase employment in the times of economic crisis. Despite these changes, with the still present gender pay gap and limited opportunities for part-time employment in these two countries the parental leave policy remains to target mainly women. The signals that women get are, however, mixed, as the legislation also limits the options for alternative care after the parent, usually the mother, returns to work.

The path shift that occurred recently in these two countries can therefore be explained by the still present policy legacies of the past that are influenced by the incentive to comply with the European objectives to increase the employment of women, and the objective of the

reconciliation of work and family life. The path shift is, however, so far applied only in the field of parental leave policy as this thesis has shown. To draw conclusions about family policy as such a further analysis of the, maternity leave, provision of family and childcare allowances and the availability of childcare services would be necessary. Nevertheless, this thesis shows that what has been accepted knowledge about the family policy in Central Eastern Europe regarding the diversity of the family support systems may have its limitations. Slovakia and Hungary are clearly an example of path shifting as opposed to the assumption that Central Eastern European countries are following their communist legacies without any significant changes.

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