

The proposed research aims to answer the following questions: What are and what should be the experiences of women as constitutional subjects in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)? What social contract underlies the constitutional order in CEE, and what type of gender order permeates constitutions in CEE? What factors shape the normative concept of womanhood in constitutional adjudication and interpretation, and how does the law in practice shape the experience of gender equality, marriage, motherhood and care? What constitutional avenues do women use to advance their rights? What are the trajectories of constitutional change and how do they respond to / or bring about social change in gender roles and family model? In which ways the constitutional experience of women contribute to a new theory of social contract?

It undertakes to verify the following observations: (1) The democratic transition in CEE has only formally recognized equal citizenship of women, but has not led to their equal participation in political processes or guaranteed the effective realization of their rights. (2) The level of participation of women in political processes, including the drafting of constitutions, constitutional amendments and legislation implementing constitutional rights, varies across CEE, and the introduction of quota or parity laws does not automatically translate into higher representation of women or inclusion of the women's perspectives in decision-making. (3) The rule of law backsliding accompanies the backlash against women's rights and further endangers their effective realization, while constitutional remedies to violations of women's rights are insufficient or non-existent. (4) Trajectories of constitutional change, including changes in constitutional interpretation, do not reflect current social changes and changing identity of constitutional subjects. (5) A new theory of the social contract needs to acknowledge the positive role of the state in the protection of women's rights and the realization of their autonomy and aspirations.

These hypotheses correspond with five main tasks in the project: (1) **Women and CEE Constitutionalism** - to analyze the specificity of constitutionalism in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and its impact on the situation of women as constitutional subjects. (2) **Women and democracy** to assess the practical realization of women's rights in political processes. (3) **Women's rights and the rule of law** to explore the nexus between the realization of the rule of law standards and women's rights. (4) **Women as right-holders and duty-bearers** to analyze the constitutional interpretation of the notion of women's dignity, autonomy and gender equality, as well as the concept of motherhood, family and care. Drawing on the research findings and specific case studies in Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia the project will propose a new theory of social contract.

In essence, the project offers a critical study of constitutionalism from the perspective of women's experiences in several Central and Eastern European countries. It defines constitutional subjects as those with sovereign power who can initiate constitutional change, directly enforce the constitution and demand its application, particularly in the area of constitutional rights and freedoms. The aim of the project is to critically assess whether and how women can use constitutional avenues to enforce their rights, and to identify factors that hinder their participation and self-fulfillment in both public and private life.