

## POPULISM AND PRONATALITY POLICY WITH REFERENCE TO BIH<sup>1</sup>

Original scientific article

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**Abstract:** From the point of view of the demographic movement of the population, the continuous negative natural increase of the population is worrying, with an increasingly pronounced difference between the number of deaths and the number of newborns. If the trend of migration of the able-bodied population to Western European countries is added to that, the prospects for economic and social development are pessimistic. In order to increase the birth rate, it is noticeable that in Bosnia and Herzegovina the so-called natalism or pronatalism is used, a political ideology that promotes the reproduction of human life or, perhaps more accurately, sees the primary role of women as mothers in order to increase the domicile population. Populist measures in the form of cash benefits for the birth of a larger number of children, child allowance or the establishment of an alimony fund cannot be the basis for creating a pronatal policy. Birth policy must cover all spheres of life and focus on the family and not just on a woman.

**Keywords:** birth rate, populism, alimony, child allowance...

### Introduction

Birth rate or fertility is a complex indicator and there are numerous factors that determine its level, which affect the formation of differences in its height among populations or individual groups of people. There are no simple explanations for this phenomenon, so experts connect them with various causes, such as urbanization, change, i.e. increase in the status and activities of women, education costs, economic difficulties and the like.

This paper pays special attention to the adopted action plans and work programs of the competent authorities in the field of family law, which relate to the promotion of fertility, the issue of alimony, the rights of mothers and motherhood, improving the life of the child. The

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analysis includes the leading political parties in the entities: the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), the Alliance for a Better Future (SBB), the Democratic Front (DF), the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the Serbian Democratic Party (SDS), and the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD).

This paper attempts to answer the question of whether populist politics contribute to an increase in birth rates. The election programs of political parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the statements of political leaders in European countries, as well as the goals that certain policies wanted to achieve were analyzed.

### **Content of family policy**

Family policies cover a wide range of state measures and interventions that address various aspects of the lives of women, men, couples, parents and children. One of the often-cited definitions of family policy sees it as "a set of measures aimed at families with children with the goal of increasing their level of well-being" (Gauthier, 1999; according to: Blum & Rille-Pfeiffer, 2010). Kamerman and Kahn show the difference between explicit and implicit family policies. Explicit family policies are designed to achieve specific goals concerning the family as a whole or its individual members, while implicit family policies include interventions in various policy areas, which are not specifically aimed at achieving family goals, but which have significant implications for children and families (Kamerman and Kahn, 1978; Kamerman, 2010; according to: Saraceno, 2011:3). When we talk about pronatal politics we refer to implicit family policies.

Kaufman and Bahle identified a number of possible motives for the development of family policy. Concerns about demographic reproduction and fertility are one of the main reasons for state intervention in the family sphere. Changes in family structure and family dynamics, including declining fertility rates and delayed births, then rising divorces, single-parent families, cohabitation and out-of-wedlock births, as well as increasing female labor market participation, pose a major challenge for family-based policies model of a male "breadwinner" of the family (Kaufman, 2002; Bahle, 2008; according to: Saraceno, 2011:2-3), such as BiH.

Whether or not to have children is a matter of personal decision, however, the current policies in the countries provide the context, i.e., the environment in which these decisions are made. The aim of this research is to present the specific measures that certain countries have implemented in order to encourage the increase of fertility, with reference to populism. The goal of increasing the fertility rate is not a problem itself, as long as policies are designed to support individual desires and respect the fundamental right of all couples and individuals

to freely and responsibly decide on the number of children they want to have, the distance between children and the period of life in which one decides to have children, without discrimination, coercion and violence. The challenges of low fertility need to be addressed through rights-based, human-centered and evidence-based approaches, and sexual and reproductive health must never be instrumentalized in efforts to shape fertility trends.

When it comes to family policy, countries have different goals, with clearly defined priorities ranging from encouraging fertility, supporting the reconciliation of family and professional obligations, through reducing inequalities in living standards and reducing family poverty, to health care for children and their education, and a fairer division of roles between women and men in terms of child and family care.

In the in further exposition the research will focus on populist statements related to birth rate increase policies, which include cash expenditures for newborns, child allowance and alimony payments.

### ***Cash outflows for newborns***

The common policy in the field of family law is the issue of increasing birth rate. Strengthening efforts, along with systemic measures that will stimulate assistance to families with more children and thus stop the negative trend in birth rates (<https://sda.ba/>), and economic assistance to families with more children (<http://www.snsd-bijeljina.org/>), as well as the adoption of birth control measures to achieve the goal of at least three children in a family (<https://www.hdzbih.org/>) are joint programs governing structures in both entities. It is noticeable that in other programs of the parties there are no clear program goals in terms of family law.

More emphasis is placed on social categories of the population in terms of helping young people, finding employment, and the like.

Unlike Western European countries, which rely heavily on immigration in terms of population growth, Eastern European countries are trying to solve the problem with natural growth and financial incentives. Thus, Poland's health minister posted a "witty" video on YouTube encouraging citizens to "multiply like rabbits" (<https://www.youtube.com>). The latest package of the Polish government from the end of 2016, called "Family 500+", includes a benefit of 120 euros for each child under 18, one-time benefits for each newborn child, as well as payments in the amount of maternity benefits for those who are not employed (<https://www.gov.pl/>). Former Hungarian President Viktor Orbán had his own methods. One of the measures adopted is that couples who get married before their 41st birthday can get subsidized loans up to approx. 28,000 euros

(<https://www.vecernji.hr/>). "Where there is room for two children, there is room for three and four," Orban once said.

In Romania, politicians are trying to solve the problem with money, ie maternity benefits, so they have complemented the rules 14 times already. Parents will soon receive cash prizes for the birth of a baby, and the goal of that measure is to increase the declining birth rate in that country. From January 1, 2017, all first-born children in Russia receive a "presidential salary". Support for young families is becoming a long-term global trend. President Vladimir Putin signed the new law which envisages social benefits for those who became parents for the first time (<https://www.statista.com>). As of July 1, 2018, the application of measures to encourage births has begun in Serbia as well - for the third child, parents receive 100 euros per month for the next ten years, and for the fourth child they receive 150 euros. For the first child there is a one-time allowance in the amount of 850 euros, and for the second child 85 euros per month for two years is paid.

In BiH during 2018, 28,555 live births were registered, which, compared to 2017, shows a decrease in the number of live births by 2.07 percent, and 36,305 people died, which, compared to 2017, shows a decrease in the number of deaths by 0.09 percent. This means that, according to the data of the Agency for Statistics of BiH (<http://www.bhas.ba/>), the natural increase last year was -7,750, while in 2017 it was -7,178. A negative natural increase was registered in all months of 2018, and this 'minus' was higher than a thousand in February and March 2018.

In most Eastern European countries, the population is declining, and the ten countries in the world with the fastest population decline rate are located in Central and Eastern Europe. BiH, with an expected population decline of 13%, is very close to taking the lead. In BiH as well as in the countries of Eastern Europe, an indirect approach to population policy has been adopted, which, through the policy of family support and numerous relevant social policies, explicitly or implicitly seeks to create conditions that could stimulate birth. Reducing the costs of parenthood and alleviating inequalities between families with and without children is primarily a social goal, but its effects can be stimulating for childbirth, i.e., an increase in the fertility rate. Populist statements and programs of the leading political parties in BiH are going in that direction.

The SDA Policy Program states stopping the trend of depopulation of BiH through effective pronatal policy measures and projects to support the most biologically and economically productive categories of the population in BiH (<https://sda.ba/>). In 2018, Bakir Izetbegović, the president of the SDA, stated that he would deal with the problem of young people leaving the country, falling birth rates and rising

mortality, especially in the next four years. The Prime Minister of the Federation of BiH (FBiH), Fadil Novalić, said that FBiH has no problem with the emigration of the population. He also said that the problem should be sought in birth rate, which has been negative in recent years, adding, "Will it be better for the citizens if I don't tell them that we have lost a third of babies in 20 years when it comes to births. From 1996 to 2015, a third fewer babies were born. Will it be easier for them if I don't tell them?" The truth is that the sessions of the FBiH Government never discussed any policies or legal solutions that would affect the improvement of the birth rate.

The political program of the SNSD states that "demographic policy must be accompanied by stimulating economic measures, and economic assistance to a family with more children is one of the most important tasks". The President of the SNSD and a member of the Presidency of BiH stated, "We must start from the youngest age, from first of all providing support to families, support young people in the reproductive phase to give birth to children, to know that a responsible society awaits them, and to make preschool education as cheap as possible, or free of charge in the next few years" (<http://www.snsd-bijeljina.org/>).

The SDS program states that this party advocates incentive economic, tax and social measures, with special treatment for families with four or more children. The state must especially help solve the housing issue for families with three or more children by allocating land for construction.

One of the program goals of SBB is the adoption of legal solutions that will stimulate assistance to families with more children and thus stop the negative trend in birth rates, given that in BiH the least babies are born of all countries in the region. Fahrudin Radončić, the president of SBB, said, "I will personally advocate that every mother who gives birth to three children gets the status of a pensioner for the rest of her life."

The HDZ's political program states, "The primary task in increasing birth rate will be to adopt birth control measures in order to achieve the goal of at least three children in a family." Incentive measures will include, inter alia, legal and institutional equality, mitigation of the economic cost of raising a child with financial benefits from the budget, reduction of the psychological cost of parenthood, and harmonization of work and parenthood. We will alleviate the economic cost of raising a child through financial measures such as one-time parental allowance, with progressive growth for each subsequent live-born child" (<https://www.hdzbih.org>).

The SDP's political program does not mention natality policy, nor has their president made any recent statements regarding family

policy. It should be noted that there are certain initiatives of SDP MPs related to family policy (alimony fund, maternity allowance).

### ***Child allowance***

In a number of countries, child allowance is a general measure of financial assistance to children, which is granted without special conditions, except for the citizenship and age of the children. Such is the case in Finland, France, Ireland, Hungary, and Sweden. However, in other countries such as BiH, Croatia, Italy, Serbia and the United Kingdom, the exercise of this right is additionally conditioned, most often by a certain amount of monthly income per family member that families must not exceed in order to be entitled to child allowance (<http://www.skupstina.me/>).

Child benefit is paid to families with one or two children, provided that the beneficiaries have been permanently resident in Greece for the previous ten years. This allowance benefit supplement does not depend on the insurance contribution, but is determined on the basis of the total family income and the number of children in the family. Child allowance is paid quarterly, while its amount can be up to 40 euros per month per child. Special child allowance is paid to families with three or more children, provided that the beneficiaries have been permanently resident in Greece for the past ten years, that they pay taxes in Greece, and that their children are also residents of the country. This allowance is also determined on the basis of the amount of family income - specifically, the condition for obtaining it is the total annual income of a family with three children not exceeding 45,000 euros, while for families with four children this amount is set at 48,000 euros. The amount increases by another 4,000 euros for each additional child. The special child allowance is 500 euros per year, and is paid in three installments (<http://www.skupstina.me/>).

In Croatia The Law on Child Allowance (<https://www.zakon.hr>) provides for the right to a cash benefit used by a parent or other person to support the maintenance and upbringing of children, which is acquired and realized depending on the total income of household members, as well as other conditions provided by law. Children up to the age of 15 are entitled to the allowance if they enroll and regularly attend secondary school, with the right being extended until the end of the school year in which the child reaches the age of 19.

In Serbia, issues related to improving the conditions for meeting the basic needs of children, special incentives for childbirth, as well as support for financially disadvantaged families with children, families with children with disabilities and children without parental care, are provided by the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children (<https://www.paragraf.rs/>). When it comes to childbirth benefits,

pursuant to the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children, the right to this benefit, parental allowance, is exercised by the mother for the first, second, third and fourth child, provided that she is a citizen of Serbia and has residence in that country. This right can also be exercised by a mother who is a foreign citizen and has the status of a permanent resident foreigner, provided that the child was born on the territory of Serbia.

The verified means test is used as a model for determining poverty in BiH. This model involves collecting information on all sources of income that are verified by certificates. If the household income is below the established minimum, the individual or household is considered to be eligible for social benefits. It is not unusual for the means test not to be independently confirmed or for social workers to check the certificates in a "qualitative" way, so these are the so-called simple means test (Maastricht Graduate School of Governance, 2013:4). In countries such as BiH, where economic activities are largely in the informal economy, income from formal work such as wages is an inaccurate indicator of a given household's social status, leading to an overflow of social benefits to non-poor segments of the population<sup>2</sup>. In order to improve the status of the poorest, and especially to improve the status of children, a different method of targeting needs to be approached. The introduction of an indirect means-testing can be proposed as an acceptable model.<sup>3</sup> Indirect means-testing implies obtaining an alternative indicator for the social status of households. According to this system, poverty is calculated on the basis of easily noticeable characteristics associated with it, such as the location and quality of the housing unit, the composition of the housing unit, education and occupation of the head of household, or possession of durable goods, real estate and the like. The use of easily observable characteristics instead of official income documents makes this model adequate for the context of countries where there is a high level of informality in the economy.<sup>4</sup> The difference between the proxy means testing and verified means-testing is reflected in the fact that in the first, the basic criterion for exercising the right is the total income of household members, while in the second, in addition to income, the

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<sup>2</sup> World Bank Report entitled: Social Benefits in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH): Creating a sustainable social rights system based on real rights indicates that cash transfers to finance social programs in BiH do not reach most of the poorest and most vulnerable. The findings of the study show that the current system is socially unfair, has negative impacts on the labor market and is fiscally unsustainable. Funds need to be much better targeted to reach those who need them, as opposed to those who meet different, rights-based criteria.

<sup>3</sup> The Indirect Means-testing was first conducted in Chile in 1980, and other Latin American countries followed this example in the following years, as targeted approaches to social spending for the poor became more popular in the light of the financial constraints and policies that tended to redirect the limited resources to those unable to meet the basic needs. See more: Maastricht Graduate School of Governance, *Targeting of budget cash payments - Theory and experiences from selected countries*, May 2013.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

property status of the beneficiary is taken into account.<sup>5</sup> Applying indirect means-testing to child allowance would mean a better redistribution of the already minimum resources allocated to this category of social assistance beneficiaries.

The Ombudsmen in BiH state that the current solutions do not ensure consistent implementation of the principle of equality before the law, especially in the cantons where the minimum standard of 66% of the salary compensation is not ensured. Child allowance is paid on the basis of an estimate of monthly income per household member and does not ensure the full realization of the right to an adequate standard of living for families (<https://www.ombudsmen.gov.ba/>). From the laws and bylaws related to the right to child allowance, it can be concluded that this right is based mainly on the status, and to a lesser extent on the needs of users. The realization of the right to child allowance depends on the income of household members, regardless of their financial situation (Krešić, 2015:244).

### ***Payment of alimony and single-parent family***

Unofficial statistics says that in as many as 80 percent of cases, the parent avoids paying alimony (<http://www.pm.rs.ba/>). Alimony in BiH sometimes amounts to only 25 euros, and even that amount is often not paid by the other parent for their child. This is one of the problems faced by single-parent families, most of which are barely surviving. In 2014, the FBiH Government instructed the Federal Ministry of Justice, in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, to consider the possibility of establishing an alimony fund and submit a proposal for a solution to the Government. In 2019, the SDP launched an initiative to change the FBiH Family Law, and the goal was to form an Alimony Fund in order to finally solve the problem of non-payment of alimony (<https://zenskamreza.ba/>). Damir Arnaut on behalf of the SBB proposed the law stipulating that those persons who have not settled all due property and legal obligations from the marital relationship or the relationship between parents and children, or alimony, cannot obtain a passport of BiH, and that the already issued passport to these persons can be confiscated (<https://www.klix.ba/>).

According to the Ombudsman for Human Rights of BiH, Ljubinko Marić, the Alimony Fund would include initial resources while in some future phase, all those who do not pay alimony would be forced to do so

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<sup>5</sup> Thus, in the Sarajevo Canton, the right to child allowance cannot be exercised by families in which one of the members of the joint household is the owner of a business or independent business or has a registered ancillary activity, or is the owner of a motor vehicle, unless they are persons with disabilities. In that case, according to the regulations in the field of tax and customs policy, they can have a motor as an orthopedic or other aid (Article 135 of the Law on Social Protection, Protection of Civilian Victims of War and Protection of Families with Children (consolidated text), "Official Gazette KS", number: 38/14.).



by the Tax Administration. In Republika Srpska, as early as in 2008, there was an initiative to establish this fund. However, due to the lack of financial resources, the establishment of this fund was never realized. That would not be a problem today. The Ombudsman for Human Rights and the Committee for Equal Opportunities of the National Assembly of Republika Srpska re-launched this initiative in 2017, but the establishment of the Alimony Fund in Republika Srpska is still pending (<https://eu-monitoring.ba/>). On behalf of the SDP, Lana Prlić, a member of the House of Representatives of the Parliament of FBiH, sent on January 25, 2019 a representative question to the Government of FBiH requesting information on whether there has been any solution to the issue and at what stage is the development of bylaws that should regulate in more detail the method of financing the alimony fund.

Damir Arnaut, a member of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH, sent the Proposal of the Law on Amendments to the Law on Travel Documents of BiH, which stipulates that persons who have not settled all due property obligations from marital or parent-child relationship, cannot get the passport of BiH, as well as that the passport already issued to such persons can be confiscated (<https://www.paragraf.ba/>). Amendments to the said law are still in the legislative procedure.

In the FBiH, the approximate amount of maintenance contributions is determined on the basis of the average salary and amounts to 30% of the average salary earned in the FBiH in the previous year. The standard amount of subsistence contribution thus determined is unacceptable for two reasons. The first concerns the needs of persons entitled to maintenance, regardless of age and regardless of whether they are minors or adults. The second reason is that in the FBiH the personal income of employees in the private sector is significantly lower than in the public sector, and the average salary in the amount of 804.37 for 2010 does not represent the actual average salary. This situation leads, as determined in the research, to an unequal determination of the amount of maintenance contributions. This supports the fact that in the FBiH it is more acceptable to calculate the approximate amount of maintenance contributions based on the total income of the maintenance provider (Krešić, 2014:138-139).<sup>6</sup>

## **Political discourse**

Increasing birth rate will not succeed without greater equality between men and women. In highly developed countries where women

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<sup>6</sup> See more: Boris Krešić, Determining the amount of support in the practice of the Center for Social Care Tuzla, Proceedings of the Second International Scientific Conference Days of Family Law "The best interest of the child in legislation and in practice", Mostar 2014.

are well educated and want to work in paid jobs, any attempt to increase fertility is unlikely to succeed if men do not share the burden of caring for children and the household and if employers continue to discriminate against women with children. The data show that countries with strong traditional gender norms, mainly in Eastern and Southern Europe, are also countries with the lowest birth rates. When it comes to the population, especially in BiH, The author believes that Bosnian national policy is necessary (policy (s) that cover the entire population of BiH with the same measures). Short-term and long-term strategies that contain clear measures to motivate the population to stay, especially in smaller rural areas, are necessary. These policies can only be established and coordinated with a specific body at the state level, regardless of its name - the Ministry of Demographic Development, the Ministry of the Family or the Ministry of Welfare or Progress (<http://balkans.aljazeera.net/>).

In order to resolve the issue of alimony in FBiH, the German way of determining the minimum amount of maintenance contributions seems the most acceptable. When proposing the determination of pay grades in relation to the age of the child, the example of Germany could also be taken as a criterion. In order to protect the best interests of a child in terms of determining the minimum amount of maintenance contributions, it is necessary to establish a temporary maintenance fund. The fund would ensure that in case of non-payment of maintenance contributions or objective inability of the debtor (parent) to pay maintenance contributions, the minimum amount of maintenance contributions would be paid from the fund, which would put all children in the same position (Krešić, 2014:138 - 139).

The family is no longer so untouchable, irreplaceable and the most important fact in the lives of people or individuals. The family is understood as a kind of interest group, where two young people come together economically and socially, much more than exclusively emotionally. Living conditions have changed, economically, technologically, security-wise, socially, and culturally. Everything has become harder, more challenging and riskier and families find it difficult to bear that pressure. Also, the presence of violence, corruption, and crime in the society has a negative impact on families and their members. The decline in overall social values and responsibilities also contributes to the weakening of marital ties and the increase in divorce. Policies must therefore confront all of the above elements and begin to provide additional rights and benefits to cohabitants.

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## POPULIZAM I PRONATALITETNA POLITIKA SA OSVRTOM NA BIH

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**Rezime:** Iskustva iz zapadne Evrope pokazuju da je cijena povećanja fertiliteta putem javnih i populističkih politika visoka, a njihov uticaj relativno mali. Zemlje sa višim prosječnim stopama fertiliteta u Evropi, kao što su Švedska i Nizozemska, generalno nemaju politike koje imaju za cilj povećanje fertiliteta, već imaju rodno-osjetljive porodične politike koje stvaraju uslove i pružaju podršku roditeljima da ostvare ravnotežu između posla i porodice, tako im omogućavajući da imaju željeni broj djece. Nordijske zemlje koje izdašno pomažu porodici s djecom kroz mnoštvo mjera što je vidljivo i iz podataka o broju novorođene djece u usporedbi s, recimo, državama južne Evrope koje puno manje odvajaju za brigu o djeci i sukladno tome imaju i puno većih problema s prirodnim prirastom. Vrsta naknada koje država omogućava roditeljima puno je važnija od iznosa. Jednokratne pomoći za novorođene, primjerice, utječu na to da porodice prije dobijaju djecu, no ne utječu na ukupan broj djece na koje se odlučuje neka porodica. Zbog toga se čini da bi veća potrošnja na kvalitetnu institucionalnu brigu o djeci, u vidu odličnih vrtića i jaslica, bila najbolji izbor za neku državu koja želi promicati rast stanovništva.

Ne postoji jedinstvena mjera koja bi podigla natalitet, no iskustva ukazuju na to da mjere usmjerene na smanjivanje konflikta između posla i brige za djecu, subvencioniranje troškova stanovanja i

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školovanja, te promicanje uloge očeva sve podržavaju rast nataliteta. Primjetno je da nijedna politička partija u BiH ne predviđa mjere koje bi dovele do smanjivanja konflikata između posla i brige za djecu. Prema srednjim procjenama iz demografskih projekcija, Bosna i Hercegovina će do 2050. godine izgubiti 18,2 posto stanovništva u odnosu na 2020. i pasti na nekih 2,7 miliona ljudi. Ovdje se ne radi samo o iseljavanju stanovništva, već i o niskoj stopi nataliteta, koji je na dnu evropskog prosjeka. U BiH, ta brojka iznosi 1,3 djece po ženi, a trendovi pokazuju da se sve manje ljudi odlučuje da imaju veći broj djece, ili djecu uopšte. Bosna i Hercegovina je nažalost primjer da populizam u natalitetnoj politici vodi ka nestanku jedne nacije.

***Ključne riječi:*** natalitet, populizam, alimentacija, dječiji dodatak,...