



No to Gender – Yes to what exactly? Insights into the European anti-gender movement

Editorial

Dear readers,

Backsliding from and within internationally recognised norms as well as the organised public backlash against sexual and reproductive health and rights as well as human rights of LGBTIQ*¹ persons is currently a problem across large parts of Europe.



Protest against abortion bans in London, 2020

On 30 March 2021, members of the Polish Parliament passed a bill to parliamentary committees that could see Poland withdraw from the Istanbul Convention² and draft a new Convention of the Rights of the Family. The name of the proposed Polish law “Yes to Family – no to Gender” reflects well the central tenets of a transnationally organised anti-gender movement in Europe: The Istanbul Convention – an internationally legally binding instru-

ment of the Council of Europe aiming to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence – is taken as an incentive to mobilise against “gender ideology”. “Yes to Family” refers to the traditional or “natural” image of family in which “women/mothers” and “men/fathers” are the two sole reference points in terms of gender. A range of issues follows from this: The arguments of allegedly endangered wellbeing of the child, of the dissolution of the traditional understanding of the family and of the idea of a “natural” order. “No to Gender” is the unifying factor, rejecting the idea of socially constructed gender roles and uniting the various actors and their different lines of argument against the bogeyman of “gender ideology”.

In this newsletter, we pose the question “No to what exactly?” and provide an introduction to the emergence, main lines of argumentation, and actors of the transnational anti-gender movement in Europe. To do so, we also take a look at the specific case of the Istanbul Convention. Furthermore, the newsletter provides insights into three focal topics: transnational financing structures of the anti-gender movement, increasing anti-trans attacks and corresponding counterstrategies, as well as gender-based cyber violence.

¹ LGBTIQ* is an abbreviation for the terms lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans *, inter* and queer and thus an abbreviation for sexual orientations and gender identities. We are using “LGBTIQ*” in this newsletter, any deviating spellings are taken over from the original texts and are used in a context-specific way.

² Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).

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Introduction: The transnational anti-gender movement in Europe

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Right-wing populist and anti-feminist movements mobilising against gender equality as well as sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)³ have gained strength across Europe in recent years. **This strengthening also brings to light an increasingly transnationally organised and financed independent anti-gender movement that attacks the rights of women and LGBTIQ* persons as well as civil society.** This is evident not only at the national (and local) but also at the European level, where alliances are organising transnationally in attempting to undermine the foundations of the European Union and to reverse already existing consensus on European level. The anti-gender movement attacks the basis of human rights in various ways, always united under the common bogeyman concept of a so-called “gender ideology”.

This contribution provides an introduction to the term “gender ideology” and to the emergence as well as central lines of argumentation of the anti-gender movement. Furthermore, the ambivalent relationship of this movement towards the European Union is discussed. The example of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) is used to illustrate how the strengthening of the movement can currently be observed in concrete terms.

“Gender ideology” as projection screen for a common enemy

Gender essentially refers to social gender relations, i.e. the ideas, expectations and norms directed at people within a society. These gender relations are not predetermined by nature, but by society. They include, for instance, assumptions about how women and men should behave according to their gender. Depending on the historical period and different societies, these assumptions may vary and change over time. Gender relations are therefore not unalterable but can in fact be changed and shaped.⁴

There is enormous diversity among the actors of the anti-gender movement in terms of their motivations, their respective lines of argumentation as well as their degree of institutionalisation. Despite national, historical and social differences in the development and shaping of these movements in Europe, there is evidence of a strong transnational strategic and financial networking against a common enemy: “gender ideology”. To summarise the opposition against the concept of “gender”, several terms like anti genderism, War against Gender, or anti-gender movement are being used. Despite these differences in terminology, there is consensus in the literature that we are dealing with a transnational phenomenon that uses national and local narratives but remains consistent across borders.⁵

3 The right to sexual and reproductive health and rights is enshrined in international and European human rights law. States are obliged to provide access to affordable and high-quality health care and services. These include, for instance, comprehensive sexual education and information, effective and modern contraceptive methods, legal and safe abortions, as well as maternal health care. Find more information from the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe [here](#).

4 Gärtner et al. (2020): *Was der Gender Care Gap über Geld, Gerechtigkeit und die Gesellschaft aussagt*. Research report. p 8.

5 This contribution uses the term anti-gender movement which is most used in international contexts. Kuhar & Paternotte (2017): *Anti-gender campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against equality*. Rowman & Littlefield, p 4. Korolczuk & Graff (2018): *Gender as “Ebola from Brussels”: The anticolonial frame and the rise of illiberal populism*. *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 43(4), pp 797-821.

Origins of the term “gender ideology”

The emergence of the term has its origins in the Catholic Church and arose in particular as a backlash against demands for the empowerment of women’s sexual and reproductive rights, for example in the context of the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna (1993), the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (1994) and the World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995).¹

¹ Kuhar & Paternotte 2017: 9 ff.

The fight against “gender ideology” serves as a common denominator and projection screen for different political objectives within the movement. Thus, the term functions as a broad projection area for racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia and transphobia, ethnic-nationalist ideas as well as hostility towards elites. The common enemy unites a multitude of different actors such as right-wing groups, right populist parties, Christian fundamentalist organisations, but also bourgeois conservatives or neoliberal circles.⁶



“People, not ideology” Equality Pride March in Krakow, 2020

The organised opposition to the promotion of gender equality policy as well as sexual and reproductive health and rights – and also the term “gender ideology” itself – is not a new phenomenon in European societies. The discourse has been led since the 1990s by conservative actors, the Catholic Church and right-wing populist parties. However, a political mobilisation of broader parts of society occurred only later.⁷ The term “gender ideology” in particular found strong resonance in the far-right scene and would not have become as well-known without its inclusion

in right-wing populist narratives.⁸ A new development in the past ten years has been the transnational unification and organised alliance-building between different sub-groups of this opposition – all under the narrative of fighting “gender ideology”.⁹

The first explicit anti-gender campaigns emerged in the mid-2000s in European countries such as Spain, Croatia, Italy, and Slovenia. These were directed, for example, against the introduction of same-sex marriage or against sexual education in schools. With more than 120,000 participants, the mass protests of the “Manif pour Tous” movement against a law introducing same-sex marriage in France in 2012 marked a peak of mobilisation and a level of visibility that was unprecedented at that time.¹⁰ This momentum is seen in the literature as an incisive turning point and as the beginning of a stronger spread of similar movements in Europe, for instance in countries like Germany, Italy, Poland, Russia, and Slovakia. There followed a surge of movements which took at times current political debates and concrete legislative proposals as an occasion for action, or acted pre-emptively to forestall feared policy changes at other times. Attacks are particularly directed against the rights of LGBTIQ* persons, reproductive rights and medicine, as well as against sexual education and gender equality.¹¹ Progress in these areas is reframed as “propagating homosexuality” or “abolishing the family”.¹²

The anti-gender movement and right-wing populism

Right-wing populist movements and the anti-gender movement are closely intertwined, as the concept of “gender ideology” has experienced considerable upward momentum from right-wing populist actors. The concept of “gender ideology” shares some ideological structures as well as certain rhetoric with right-wing populism. Common to both is in particular (but not only) a strong sense of community of “us” in distinction to “the others”. The latter can be perceivably corrupt elites, international and supranational powers (e.g. “Brussels”), or a feminist “lobby”. The term “gender” is usually not translated into the respective national language in order to make it seem foreign and imposed from “outside”. Nevertheless, anti-gender campaigns should not be seen as a manifestation or direct consequence of surging right-wing populism. The diversity of the actors – which is much greater within the anti-gender movement – and the strong religious orientation of the anti-gender movement make a clear and direct conflation with right-wing populism impossible.¹

¹ Kuhar & Paternotte 2017: 13 ff., Kuhar & Paternotte 2018: 13 ff.

Manif pour Tous – The demonstration for all

The “Manif pour tous” is an alliance of various movements and non-governmental organisations that emerged in France in 2012. The network consists of Catholic organisations, conservative think tanks, bloggers, and intellectuals. The movement mobilised thousands of demonstrators against same-sex marriage and against “gender ideology”. In November 2012, the first demonstration against same-sex marriage took place in Paris, gathering more than 120,000 participants.¹

¹ Kováts & Pöim 2015: 27.

⁶ Henninger et al. (2021): *Einleitung: Mobilisierungen gegen Feminismus und ‚Gender‘. Erscheinungsformen, Erklärungsansätze und Gegenstrategien.* *Gender: Zeitschrift für Geschlecht, Kultur und Gesellschaft*, (Special edition 6), pp 10 ff. For a closer look on this, see *Actors and Discourses*.

⁷ Kuhar & Paternotte 2017: 255 ff.

⁸ Kuhar & Paternotte 2017: 13 ff., Brinkschröder (2021): *Rettungsinseln in „LGBT-freien Zonen“.* In *Anti-Genderismus in Europa*. transcript-Verlag, pp 298 f.

⁹ Graff & Korolczuk (2022): *Anti-Gender Politics in the Populist Moment.* Taylor & Francis, p 5, Denkovski et al. (2021): *POWER OVER RIGHTS Volume II*. pp 53 f.

¹⁰ Paternotte & Kuhar (2018): *Disentangling and locating the “global right”: Anti-gender campaigns in Europe.* *Politics and Governance*, 6(3), pp 7 f.

¹¹ Paternotte & Kuhar 2018: 7-8, Kuhar & Paternotte 2017: 1-16; 253-272, Brinkschröder 2021: 297-310, Kováts & Pöim (2015) “Gender as symbolic glue.” *Budapest, Foundation for European Progressive Studies*. pp 126 ff., cf. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (2016): *GENDER MATTERS! ANTIFEMINISM Newsletter on gender activities by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung – No. 6.*

¹² See the section on *Central lines of argument*.

The ambivalent relationship of the anti-gender movement towards the European Union

Despite limited powers in the field of social rights and equality, the European Union influences national policies via ‘soft’ mechanisms – for instance, through common minimum standard setting or strategic direction as provided in the [Gender Equality Strategy](#) and the [LGBTIQ Equality Strategy](#)¹³. Furthermore, the European Union helps shape national legislation through a strong framework of anti-discrimination directives¹⁴, including on equal treatment in the labour market, and by means of the European Court of Justice’s case law.



International Women’s Day in Brussels, 2021

On the one hand, the European Union (often rather abstractly: “Brussels”) as well as other international organisations are seen as a “corrupt elite” that undermines nation states and their national sovereignty and values.¹⁵ As an example: At a large demonstration against sexual education and information in Warsaw in 2015, some protest signs read that gender was “Ebola from Brussels”. The image of colonialist oppression by the European Union, and thus the EU as a source of the evil, is deliberately conveyed.¹⁶

On the other hand, transnational networking of the actors – up to their representation in the European Parliament – is an important component of the movement. With the 2019 elections to the European Parliament, the proportion of members of the European Parliament who oppose gender equality, women’s sexual and reproductive rights, sexual education, same-sex marriage, and the Istanbul Convention on Combating All Forms of Violence against Women doubled to an estimated 30 per cent.¹⁷ The strengthening and growing representation of right-wing populist parties in the European Parliament, but also in the European Council or the Council of the European Union, is leading to their increased influence in gender equality policy debates, for instance when it comes to [blocking the term or concept of “gender”](#) in official documents.

Central lines of argument: Glorifying “natural” gender roles and a traditional family image as well as protection of children’s well-being

In addition to the rejection of the concept of “gender”¹⁸, the anti-gender movement has the following core themes across transnational borders, which can also be used to highlight their major lines of argumentation:

- **Same sex marriage:** This issue often triggers protests and usually goes hand in hand with discussions about adoption rights for same-sex couples, surrogacy, reproductive medicine and access to it for both, individuals and same-sex couples. The rights of LGBTIQ* persons are often at the forefront of attacks by the anti-gender movement. [In this context, same-sex marriage is presented by the anti-gender movement](#)

13 *The Strategy for Gender Equality 2020–2025 and the Strategy for Equality of LGBTIQ Persons 2020–2025 were published by the European Commission under its priority of a “Union of Equality”.*

14 **Anti-discrimination directives of the European Union:** *Council Directive 2000/43/EC implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, Council Directive 2000/78/EC establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation, Council Directive 2004/113/EC implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services, Council Directive 2006/54/EC on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation. A fifth anti-discrimination Directive, which among other things is intended to create a uniform level of protection for people with disabilities, has been blocked in the Council of the European Union since 2008. According to its political guidelines, the Commission of Ursula von der Leyen will propose new legislative measures in the field of anti-discrimination.*

15 *Kuhar & Paternotte 2017: 7.*

16 *Korolczuk & Graff 2018: 811 ff., Kováts & Pöim 2015.*

17 *Zacharenko (2019): The neoliberal fuel to the anti-gender movement. International Politics and Society (online).*

18 *Definition see section “Gender ideology” as a projection screen for a common enemy.*

The anti-gender movement in the European Parliament

In particular, the strong election results of the Italian Lega, the British Brexit party (having left parliament on 31 January 2020), Poland’s Law and Justice, Hungary’s Fidesz and France’s Rassemblement National contributed to a surge of the movement. Most of these MEPs belong to the right-wing populist and nationalist Identity and Democracy (ID) or the European Conservatives and Reformers (ECR) parliamentary groups. However, there are also members of the European Parliament representing these views within the European People’s Party (EPP) and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) groups.¹

The research project **Gender, party politics and democracy in Europe: A study of European Parliament’s party groups** (EUGenDem), based at the University of Tampere in Finland and funded by the European Research Council, analyses, among other things, party politics in relation to gender. The workshop “Mobilizing around gender and sexual and reproductive rights in the EU institutions”, hosted by the project in April 2021, focused on the political implications of the presence and influence of the anti-gender movement in the institutions. A video recording of the workshop is available on the [project’s website](#).

1 *Zacharenko 2019.*

as a gateway for political reforms that specifically aim to abolish the “traditional”, “natural” role of mother and father and, in general, the binary gender concept of women and men as the sole two sexes. The resulting sexual diversity is thus considered an “abolition of the family” (meaning the heteronormative nuclear family).

- **Reproductive rights:** Historically, this is the issue that sparked the movement’s emergence in the 1990s. Abortion, contraception and access to reproductive medicine continue to be central topics to the movement. Abortion is seen as a “culture of death” and is particularly strongly opposed by the Catholic Church and other religious organisations.
- **Sexual education and information in schools:** The teaching of subjects such as gender equality and homosexuality is particularly strongly attacked. The anti-gender movement uses the image of the innocent child who is permanently damaged in his or her development, among other things by the blurring of “natural facts” such as the existence of only two genders/sexes. This confrontation with “excessive” sex education and the promotion of “sexual promiscuity” would allegedly lead to a “hypersexualisation” of children at a young age.
- **Democratic rights:** In this context, “gender ideology” is presented as a political project. Often, “corrupt elites” are highlighted, allegedly aiming to enforce “gender ideology” as a new form of totalitarianism against the will of the public/the people. In some cases, “gender ideology” is also presented as a new leftist ideology based on communism, or as a neo-colonialist Western project. In any case, the anti-gender movement presents itself as a defender of democracy against “gender ideology” as a new undemocratic political system. The right to religious freedom is also often mentioned since the political project of “gender ideology” allegedly forces Christian people in particular to act against their own conscience.¹⁹



“We demand assisted reproduction for all” LGBT protest in Reims, 2021

These lines of argumentation are all reliant on mobilising emotions such as fear or anger. “Gender ideology” is presented as a threat to a particular order (e.g. gender roles, family) and the perceived consequences (e.g. endangering the welfare of the child, restricting (religious) freedom) are used to fuel fear and anger towards political correctness, “the elite” or politics in general.²⁰

The focus on “traditional” families, the “natural” (i.e. binary) understanding of gender as well as the linking of these issues with the protection of children from the alleged “propagation of homosexuality” or the “abolition of the family” are the classic lines of argument of the anti-gender movement. However, in addition to religious and conservative patterns of argumentation, the anti-gender movement now often appropriates and reinterprets scientific or human rights approaches. One pattern is the narrative that there are competing legal norms: For instance, the argument that international law protects the right to life before birth is being used as a justification for banning abortion.²¹

In addition to the Church and conservative actors who may come across as “outdated”, a number of new civil society initiatives have been founded that present themselves

¹⁹ Kuhar & Paternotte 2018: 9-10, Brinkschröder 2021: 297 f.

²⁰ Sauer (2021): *Affekte und Emotionen in Anti-Gender-Mobilisierungen. Blog interdisziplinäre Geschlechterforschung (online)*.

²¹ Denkovski et al. 2021: pp 53 f.

Disputes around the term “gender” in official documents

Polish and Hungarian representatives in particular are waging a struggle in Brussels over the use of the term “gender equality”. Both countries are referring to the wording “equality between women and men” in the Treaty on European Union. Equality between women and men was introduced as early as 1957 with the Treaty of Rome as a fundamental principle of the European Union, based on the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. By omitting the addition “between women and men” and instead using the more current and inclusive wording “gender equality”, opponents of the term see their fears of “gender ideology” confirmed: The perceived dissolution of the two “natural” sexes, i.e. man and woman.¹ A concrete example is the **Porto Declaration on Social Affairs**, adopted by the European Council on 8 May 2021. Several media reported in advance that Poland and Hungary blocked the wording “promote gender equality” in section 10 of this declaration and additionally lobbied for the reference to Principle 2 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which requires that “equality of treatment and opportunities between women and men must be ensured and fostered in all areas”. The final version now avoids the term “gender” and includes the wording to „promote equality [...] for every individual in our society”.²

¹ EU’s foreign policy gender plan faces resistance from Poland and Hungary (25.11.2020); c.f. also Kováts (2019): *Neuen Mut statt neue Tabus – Dilemmata der Genderpolitik in der EU überwinden*, Gunda Werner Institut, Heinrich Böll Stiftung (online).

² EURACTIV: *Poland, Hungary block ‘gender equality’ from EU social summit (08.05.2021)*.



"Jesus had two fathers, too" Christopher Street Day in Cologne, 2019

as "concerned citizens". These often stage large-scale anti-gender campaigns and organise protests. Examples include Manif pour Tous (France, Italy), Demo für Alle (Germany), U ime obitelji (Croatia), or Civilna iniciativa za družino in pravice otrok (Slovenia), all of which reach a much broader audience since they appear younger and more modern. By criticising liberal values such as individualism, human rights and gender equality, or also global capitalism, they

create a new transnational political mobilisation. These anti-gender opponents form an anti-elitist civil society that rejects individualism and minority rights as core values of liberal democracies. These movements can act as umbrella organisations for several sub-organisations and connect transnationally across Europe.²²

An example of the anti-gender movement's surge in Europe: The 'War on Gender' against the Istanbul Convention

One example that illustrates well how the anti-gender movement is currently acting against human rights of LGBTIQ* persons and women on different levels (national, European, institutional) and with different narratives (see specific examples from the countries below) is the Istanbul Convention.

The Istanbul Convention was signed in Istanbul in 2011 and entered into force in 2014. It is to date the most far-reaching internationally legally binding instrument to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence. The Convention is based on a comprehensive and broad concept of violence, which basically encompasses all forms of violence. According to the Convention, violence against women and domestic violence constitute human rights violations. Such violence is an expression of a historically grown unequal power relationship between men and women and is to be seen as a consequence of structural discrimination. In this context, the Convention defines the term "gender" – which was controversially discussed during the drafting of the Convention – as socially shaped roles, behaviours, activities, and characteristics that a particular society considers appropriate for women and men. In this sense, the agreement obliges the signatory parties to eliminate prejudices, customs, and traditions, etc. that are based on the idea of inferiority of women or on specific roles assigned to women and men.

Meanwhile, the rights of LGBTIQ* persons are still not sufficiently recognised in international and national law. Also within the Istanbul Convention, there is no structural recognition of these rights.²³ However, in implementing the Istanbul Convention – and in particular in measures to protect the rights of victims – the signatory parties are obliged not to discriminate against persons affected by violence on the basis of, inter alia, their sexual orientation or gender identity.²⁴ In this regard, the Council of Europe affirms that lesbian, bisexual and trans* women have access to protection measures in their right to live a life free from violence. With regard to domestic violence, gay men may also be included in the victim protection group.²⁵

22 Kuhar & Paternotte 2017: 260; 264 ff., Korolczuk & Graff 2018: 798 f.

23 Niemi et al (2020): *International Law and Violence Against Women: Europe and the Istanbul Convention*. Routledge, p 82.

24 Istanbul Convention article 4, section 3.

25 The Observatory has analysed the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in various EU member states: Lange et al. (2020): *Violence against Women – On the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Denmark, Finland & Austria*, Working Paper No 21, *Lesben- und Schwulenverband (LSVD): Istanbul-Konvention: Verhütung und Bekämpfung von Gewalt gegen Frauen* (online), Council of Europe: *Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence: Questions and answers* (online).

Accession of the European Union to the Istanbul Convention

Although the Istanbul Convention was signed on behalf of the European Union on 13 June 2017, it has not yet been ratified as no Council decision to that effect has been taken. The Council has so far made the adoption of such a decision subject to the unanimity of the member states. The Court of Justice of the European Union (ECJ) issued an **opinion on the Istanbul Convention** on 6 October, which clarifies that the European Union cannot accede to the Istanbul Convention without unanimity in the Council. According to the ECJ, the Convention covers both areas of competence of the EU and of the member states, which is why it should be signed by the EU and the individual member states. More specifically, the opinion argues that the Council does not need a unanimous decision by all the member states when adopting a decision on the conclusion of the Convention, since the qualified majority voting procedure already laid down in the Treaties (Article 218 TFEU) cannot be extended to include a new upstream step of unanimity.



“Not one more” Protest against domestic violence and femicides in Paris, 2020

Controversies over the Istanbul Convention’s underlying concepts of gender as a social construct and violence as a comprehensive structural phenomenon have in recent years led to an increasingly strong politicisation of the issue by a transnationally organising anti-gender movement. The Istanbul Convention is demonised as a Trojan horse through which the Council of Europe wants to “sneak in” same-sex marriage and more rights for LGBTIQ* persons. It is argued

that the “gender ideology” is a concept imposed from “outside” or “above”; a concept which allegedly devalues prevailing traditional values and ideas within the respective country and threatens, among others, the “natural order of the sexes”. In addition, a lack of demarcation between men and women would only put women at an even greater disadvantage, one argument goes. The anti-gender movement thus does not focus on violence against women, i.e. the core issue of the Convention, but constructs joining the Convention as a “gateway” for the decay of traditional values and guiding principles by the “gender ideology”.²⁶

The anti-gender movement has been increasingly successful with this politicisation of the issue of violence against women, which has ultimately led to observable backsliding tendencies in several countries:

- **Bulgaria** signed the Convention in 2016. In 2018, however, the Bulgarian Constitutional Court declared the Istanbul Convention unconstitutional. In an eight-to-four ruling, the court declared that the Convention’s use of gender as a social construct violated the Bulgarian Constitution as the latter establishes a binary understanding of gender – male and female.²⁷
- **Poland** has ratified the Convention already in 2015. However, a legislative initiative to withdraw this ratification is currently underway in parliament. On 30 March 2021, the corresponding bill “Yes to Family, No to Gender” was passed by the Polish parliament to the parliamentary committees for further drafting work. The Polish government itself argues that the Istanbul Convention does not respect religion and promotes “gender ideology”. There are concerns that the Convention might be replaced by a new treaty which would ban same-sex marriages, among other issues.²⁸
- **Slovakia** was one of the first countries to sign the Convention in 2011. In 2019, the Slovakian parliament decided not to ratify the Convention, though. Opponents, including representatives of the Catholic Church, have in recent years repeatedly criticised the Convention for propagating so-called “gender ideology” and enabling “gay marriage” under the guise of protecting women’s rights. They argue that the issue of women’s protection was very serious and attempts to foist “gender ideology” within such protection frameworks were thus unacceptable.²⁹
- **Hungary** signed the Convention in 2014; but in 2020, the parliament passed a resolution calling on the government not to ratify it. The reasons given are the definition of gender in the Convention as well as the recognition of gender-based violence as a

²⁶ Online seminar on the Backlash against Women’s Rights and the Istanbul Convention (Video available on Youtube), Niemi et al 2020: 260, Council of Europe (2021): *Conference Report – Gender equality and the Istanbul Convention: a decade of action*, pp 17 ff. (online).

²⁷ Human Rights Watch (2018): *Speak Out to Protect Bulgaria’s Women* (online), Darakcho (2019): “The Western Feminists Want to Make Us Gay”: Nationalism, Heteronormativity, and Violence Against Women in Bulgaria in Times of “Anti-gender Campaigns”. *Sexuality & Culture* 23(4), p 1209.

²⁸ Euronews: *Istanbul Convention: Poland moves a step closer to quitting domestic violence treaty* (01.04.2021), *Balkan Insight: Poland’s Replacement for Istanbul Convention Would Ban Abortion and Gay Marriage* (15.03.2021).

²⁹ EURACTIV: *Slovakia still opposes EU accession to Istanbul Convention preventing violence against women* (29.11.2019), *Nachrichtendienst Östliche Kirchen: Slowakei: “Istanbul-Konvention” wird nicht ratifiziert* (19.03.2021).

“LGBT-ideology free zones” in Poland

In the **Rainbow Index** – which the umbrella organisation of LGBTIQ* associations in Europe, **ILGA-Europe**, compiles together with activists – Poland ranks last among the EU member states. The index is a continuously updated comparative tool that rates 49 European states on their LGBTIQ equality laws and policies. ILGA-Europe has also created a **timeline about the rise of anti-LGBT hate in Poland** from 2018 to the present.

The national conservative Polish ruling party Law and Justice (PiS) uses the narrative of an attack on the traditional family and of endangering the best interests of children to stir up anti-LGBTIQ* sentiment and to thus support corresponding legislative measures. This goes hand in hand with anti-feminist attacks with regard to sexual and reproductive rights. For example, there is a bill to ban sexual education in schools whose text considers, among other things, the provision of information about LGBTIQ* persons to minors as “propaganda”. The agitation against LGBT persons became particularly strong during the election campaign in the run-up to the 2020 presidential elections: during a campaign event, the then incumbent and subsequently re-elected president Andrzej Duda said that LGBT persons were not people, but a mere ideology. Starting in the summer of 2019, a good third of Polish municipalities, counties and voivodeships had at least temporarily declared themselves “LGBT ideology-free zones”. The original wording of a newspaper that distributed stickers saying “LGBT-free zone” had previously been banned by the courts. LGBT people living in these mainly south-eastern areas report a significant increase in open discrimination.

By now, the number of such “zones” in Poland has been reduced by half: The Polish region of Swietokrzyskie on 22 September annulled a motion against so-called “LGBT ideology” after the European Union threatened to suspend funding under the REACT-EU (Reconstruction Aid for Cohesion and Territories of Europe) programme. Three other regions followed suit and also voted to cancel their regional anti-LGBT resolutions.¹

¹ *Die Zeit*: *Polnische Region hebt Status als „LGBT-freie Zone“ auf* (23.09.2021), *Lesben- und SchwulInnenverband (LSVD): „LSBTI-freie Zonen“ in Polen - Steigender Hass im Nachbarland* (online), *Brinkschröder* 2021: 297-310.

form of persecution in asylum procedures. Both endanger Hungarian culture, laws, traditions and national values, the parliament argued.³⁰

- **Turkey** was one of the first states to ratify the Istanbul Convention in 2011 and had already passed a law referring to the provisions of the Convention. Ten years later, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan issued a decree to withdraw from the Convention on 1 July 2021. The reason given was that the Convention normalised homosexuality, which would allegedly contradict Turkey's traditional social and family values.³¹



Protest against Turkey exiting the Istanbul Convention in Istanbul, 2021

The developments on national levels also led to a blockade by individual member states regarding the accession of the **European Union** to the Istanbul Convention. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen had made this accession one of her Commission's top priorities.

The Anti-Gender Movement: Actors and Discourses

Damjan Denkovski is Deputy Executive Director at the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (CFFP) working on issues relating to the anti-gender movement. The CFFP is an international research, advocacy, and consulting organisation aiming to promote an intersectional feminist approach to foreign and security policy. As a non-partisan organisation, CFFP encourages governments to implement feminist values in their policymaking processes and works with a number of Governments, activists and other organisations to advance Feminist Foreign Policy on a global level.

The anti-gender movement is a highly organised (but not centralised), well-funded, transnational movement working to undermine women's rights, LGBTQI* rights, and civil society.

While these actors nominally oppose "gender ideology", we must look at their efforts not as a simple pushback, but as being about power and maintaining or promoting social and political hierarchies in the face of their (perceived) decline.

The context of shrinking civil society space and general decline in freedom around the world is therefore crucial in understanding such efforts.

Among the actors that constitute the anti-gender movement, we see significant diversity. One can divide the actors into **three groups: the old, the new and the allies.**³²

The "Old"

This group includes actors such as the Catholic Church, right-wing think tanks and institutions, as well as wealthy individuals / families and their foundations, many from the United States. Certain Russian oligarchs and EU-based family foundations can be included here as well. These actors have established relationships with power centres around the world – either through populating local and national administrations with

Power over rights study

In March 2021, the CFFP published the **Power over rights** study, supported by the German Federal Foreign Office and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. The study includes the report "Understanding and countering the transnational anti-gender movement" providing a comparative analysis of the history, narratives, and strategies of anti-gender movements as well as a collection of five case studies, which analyse anti-gender efforts and activities in five specific contexts.¹

¹ Denkovski, D., Bernarding, N. and Lunz, K. (2021). *Power over rights: Understanding and countering the transnational anti-gender movement.*

³⁰ Index: *Hungarian Parliament refuses to ratify the Istanbul Convention for its asylum provisions and inclusion of gender* (05.05.2020).

³¹ More information and news coverage by *Deutsche Welle, BBC.*

³² Kuhar, R. & Paternotte, D., 2017. *The anti-gender movement in comparative perspective.* In: *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe. Mobilizing Against Gender Equality.* s.l.: Rowman and Littlefield, pp. 253-272.

their representatives or surrogates, securing observer status in international fora, or through the investment of large sums of money to advance their political goals.

The “New”

This group mostly includes initiatives specifically created in the last decade to oppose the concept of ‘gender ideology’. Many of them take the form of concerned parents or concerned citizens initiatives which – across the globe – show significant overlap in terms of the visual identity, branding, and message. There is also significant overlap among the individuals featuring in these campaigns, as well as their funders. The group also includes government-organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs) and other institutions advancing anti-equality ideas, as well as political parties around the world who have either been created for this purpose or jumped on the bandwagon for political points (coming ideologically from both the left and right of the political spectrum).

The “Allies”

Allyship in this context manifests in two ways: either as uncritically presenting the ideas of the anti-gender movement as valid movements for rights or as actively promoting their worldview. This group includes academics, politicians, corporations, and journalists / media outlets.

Discourses

All of the discursive framings of the anti-gender movement rely on vagueness and are fear-based. Until the 2010s, much of the rhetoric was focused on the defence of what is perceived to be normal, or natural, often in religious terms. While much of the argumentation of the anti-gender movement has since moved away from naturalistic and religious arguments, the fear for the well-being of children continues to resonate well with the target audience of these movements. The opposition to women’s and LGBTQI* rights is now constructed differently – we find an increasing reliance on secular, scientific or even human rights language to argue against equality.

What unites these actors is the ability to “squeeze different discourses into one big threat”³³, and construct ‘gender/gender ideology’ as “an attack on at least one of the three Ns”, which these actors claim to defend: nature, the nation, or normality.³⁴



International Women's Day in Berlin, 2020

mobilise against. ‘Gender ideology’ is a politically opportune concept which refers to a set of notions revolving around the idea of radical ‘gender feminists’ and the ‘homosexual agenda’ advancing an idea that dismisses the natural order of things (i.e., the natural

These actors do not come from the same ideological matrix, and they often do not share “the same ideological framework”³⁵. They are occasionally even in opposition to each other on specific issue areas, and their motivations to either drive or support anti-gender campaigns vary strongly. However, they have successfully constructed the empty signifier of ‘gender ideology’, which sublimates multiple issues into one threat that is easy to emotionally

Anti-Gender Campaigns and Right-Wing Populism

The global rise of right-wing politics and disinformation campaigns has aided the growth of the anti-gender movement. There are significant overlaps in the discourse used by the anti-gender movement and right-wing actors: their resistance to globalisation and scepticism of international norms, nationalism, and racial anxieties, scapegoating, and the construction of conspiracy theories. At the same time, it is important to note that while there are considerable overlaps and interactions between the anti-gender movement and the far-right, they are not the same – left-wing actors can take up anti-gender positions, and right-wing actors can take up feminist rhetoric as part of xenophobic and racist argumentation. **See Power over Rights Volume 1, Section 1.3.**

³³ Kuhar, R. & Paternotte, D., 2017. *The anti-gender movement in comparative perspective*. In: *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe. Mobilizing Against Gender Equality*. s.l.: Rowman and Littlefield, pp. 253-272.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

hierarchy of men and women, for instance), which in pushing for individual identity over social expectations undermines the anthropological basis of the family and, therefore, society.

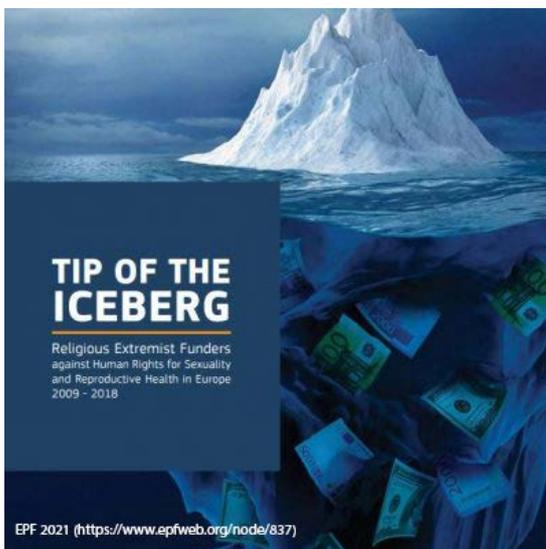
This concept provided both a framework for understanding the advances of women's and LGBTQI* rights in international fora and an umbrella term for the anti-gender movement to mobilise around by framing 'gender' as a threat to society.

These approaches rely on establishing hierarchies of rights, i.e., that some rights (in this instance, those rights that are seen to conform with 'traditional' values) take precedence over the rights of women and LGBTQI* persons. In this way, all of these ideas are united in their reliance on fear-based reactions, and by their assertion that equality of human rights for all is a radical, destabilising idea. Once this notion is deconstructed, and we observe that there is nothing radical about expanding the concept of human rights to include traditionally marginalised groups, we see that it is, in fact, the anti-gender movement itself which advances radical ideas intending to promote a world order which maintains the dominance of the White Heterosexual Cis-Male from the Global North.

Strategic transnational funding structures

Neil Datta is Secretary of the *European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (EPF)* and author of the newly published report from June 2021: *Tip of the Iceberg: Extremist Religious Funding against Human Rights for Sexuality and Reproduction in Europe – 2009 to 2018*.

The emergence of the anti-gender movement in Europe was first underestimated, many assuming it to be the well-known relic religious lobby until it started to mobilise popular support, influence policies and shape the political landscape. Since, many actors have been forced to pay greater attention to the **emergence of a broader anti-gender movement targeting a range of seemingly unrelated issues ranging from the well-known targets of abortion and LGBTQI rights to encompass challenging aspirations for gender equality among others**. A question often raised, and indispensable in understanding the emergence of any new social movement, is how the anti-gender movement financed?



Tip of the Iceberg Report

Over the years, a steady trickle of information on the funding sources for European anti-gender actors has emerged. To date, very few attempts have been made to assemble the different existing pieces of information, compare them with each other, across national borders and even regions or issue areas.

The new EPF report "Tip of the Iceberg: Extremist Religious Funding against Human Rights for Sexuality and Reproduction in Europe – 2009 to 2018" attempts to fill the gap in understanding the funding system which supports the religious extremists' efforts to roll back human rights in Europe.

In Part 1: Tip of the iceberg, this report identifies USD 707.2 million in anti-gender funding over the 2009–2018 period originating from a group of 54 organisations, namely NGOs, foundations, religious organisations, and political parties. There are three principal geographic origins for these organisations, namely the United States, the Russian Federation and Europe (excluding Russia).

In Part 2: Beneath the iceberg, the report takes a closer look at the original source of anti-gender funding in Europe. It details four resource mobilisation mechanisms:

1. grass-roots fundraising;
2. support from socio economic elites;
3. public funding;
4. and religious actors.

The report concludes with two illustrative case studies explaining how religious extremists collaborate across borders to generate new anti-gender initiatives and explores the overlapping normative, economic and political motivations which drive various actors towards anti gender activism. The picture that emerges is of a transnational community of likeminded religious extremists and related alt- and far-right actors making strategic funding decisions across international borders.

Responding to anti-trans attacks in Europe

Richard Köhler is Advocacy Director at Transgender Europe (TGEU), a member-based organisation fighting to strengthen the rights and wellbeing of trans people in Europe and Central Asia. With 169 member organisations representing 47 different countries, TGEU strives to represent the diverse needs of their members within human rights mechanisms, build the capacity and skills of their members to meet the needs of local communities, and develop intersectional and decolonised programmes to build more resilient and connected trans movements.

Anti-trans attacks are on the rise in Europe. Often, they go unnoticed in the wider backlash against women, migrants, LGBTIQ and other marginalised groups. This text seeks to show the development thereof within a transnational context and provide some emerging insights on counter-strategies.

Development and trans-national context



London Pride, 2019

and open societies. Within this context, attacks against LGBTQ and trans people are often seen as entry-points to push societies away from democracy.

Restoring the natural order: The “Agenda Europe”

In his 2018 book “Restoring The Natural Order: The Religious Extremists’ Vision to Mobilize European Societies Against Human Rights on Sexuality and Reproduction”, Neil Datta describes “Agenda Europe”, a group originally founded in 2013 by US and European activists that, at the time of publication in 2018, united over 100 anti-human rights, anti-women’s rights, and anti-LGBTI organisations in more than 30 countries.

The development of the organisation, its normative framework, its strategies up to a to-do list of long, medium- and short-term goals in the areas of marriage and family, equal treatment and anti-discrimination, as well as and the key actors behind them are presented in detail in this book.

Agenda Europe aims to reverse existing legislation on basic human rights related to reproductive and sexual rights, including the right to divorce, access to contraception, reproductive medicine or abortion, the right to equal treatment for LGBTI persons, or the right to change one’s gender without fear of legal consequences.

It can be observed that the counter-movement on reproductive and sexual rights in Europe is strategically and transnationally organised from the Vatican and represents an alliance of various conservative, traditionalist and Christian actors. The alliance has a concise political agenda to bring about change in the legal and social status quo. This common vision is explained by Agenda Europe in its manifesto “Restoring the natural order”. In general, the work of the organisation, just like the manifesto, is organised in secret and members are not allowed to disclose any information about the organisation or its objectives to third parties.

Anti-trans attacks

Anti-trans attacks have recently intensified in Europe, resulting in the perilous and concrete removal of rights for trans people, as well as a push back of their societal position. Recent examples include:

- Legislators in **Hungary** eliminated legal gender recognition for trans people in 2020 on the basis that sex is an immutable category. (Similar anti-trans bills in Russia and Slovakia have been stopped; but could re-surface at any moment.) Hungarian legislators also argued that children had a right to grow up according to their sex assigned at birth, clearly hijacking children rights language.
- It is uncertain how the Constitutional Court in **Bulgaria** will rule on a request to assess the constitutionality of legal gender recognition. The same court had declared in 2018 the Istanbul Convention was unconstitutional for its usage of the word “gender”.
- In 2020 an anti-gender legislation bill in **Romania**, which would have banned the right to speak about gender and gender identity in educational settings, was only stopped last-minute.
- In Western Europe, healthcare providers in the **UK** and **Sweden** eliminated access to trans-specific healthcare for minors following a controversial UK court decision denying trans children agency over their gender identity.
- Similarly, legal reforms for self-determination in legal gender recognition failed in the **UK** and **Germany** and were derailed in **Spain**.

Public discourse questioning the existence of trans people has created a toxic atmosphere for an already vulnerable community. Increased levels of stress, anxiety, and suicidality amongst trans people are common, and particularly grave amongst trans youth and those affected by intersectional discrimination (e.g., on grounds of migration status, race/ ethnicity, HIV-status, poverty, etc.). These effects are further complicated by governmental COVID-19 responses that increase policing and the need to show identity documents. Trans people are in these situations often outed, resulting in social exclusion, discrimination and violence.

Why is this Happening?

Anti-equality forces have identified Europe as a global motor for equality. If this equality-motor stutters, it negatively and globally affects the struggle for a more equal world for all. In this context, anti-trans attacks serve (at least) three aims:

- First, denying trans people’s rights and existence helps to [maintain male hegemony](#). Like a racist narrative that builds on two mutually exclusive categories of “black” and “white”, traditional gender norms drive on “man” and “women” as natural opposites. In this logic, trans people cannot exist.
- Second, it is easier to mobilize a large populace behind [simple ‘truths’](#) of i.e. who is a woman. Anti-trans narratives speak to people who feel left behind and anxious about societal progress. Relatively few people know a trans person in their day-to-day lives, making them vulnerable to misinformation and manipulation.



Trans Pride in London, 2020

- Third, trans people are portrayed by anti-gender actors as a threat to other vulnerable groups, such as women and children. As a result, some historically progressive actors feel they need to choose between supporting women or supporting trans people (even though many trans people are or have been women), serving to **divide potential allies** who might otherwise be able to defeat gender-based attacks. The consequences run deep for civil society and democracies at large.

Counter-strategies

First, to counter anti-gender attacks, one needs to be able to recognise them. Trans rights groups, such as TGEU, GATE³⁶, ILGA-Europe³⁷, and others, have developed resources to help identify and respond to anti-trans narratives. Progressive actors and allies should speak up – from a position of solidarity while supporting the voices of trans people whose stories can help debunk anti-gender myths. **To this end, it helps if pro-equality actors reach out proactively and establish trustful relationships with trans groups and networks.**

Secondly, it is important to remember the human rights framework that includes all people – including trans people – continues to be relevant and more important than ever. **Progressive actors need to advocate for equality for everyone, not just the majority.** Commonly shared values – such as autonomy, self-determination and the right to safety and freedom from violence – can provide a solid foundation for a more intersectional, cross-movement response to anti-gender rhetoric.

Thirdly, the actors behind anti-trans rhetoric need to be exposed and shown for who they are. **Revealing the full agenda of these groups, including their financial and political backers and how unscrupulously they act, make it clear that their attacks on trans people are only one part of a deeper, anti-democracy agenda.** It needs to be understood that where trans people are attacked, a broader agenda is at play targeting women's rights, human rights, and open societies.

Gender-based cyber violence

Marie Wittenius, *Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe*



The anti-gender movement is very active online and makes significant use of the possibilities offered by information and communication technology. For example, the internet can be used to create a sense of belonging among supporters of the movement, to reach new potential supporters, to build national and international networks, and to plan and organise demonstrations and protests (both online and

physical). Mobilisation online includes, among other things, sending protest messages en masse, especially to politicians, producing and distributing content depicted as news, or initiating e-petitions, for instance on the transnational platform CitizenGO.³⁸ The platform, run by a right-wing conservative foundation registered in Spain, claims

³⁶ GATE (Trans, Gender Diverse and Intersex Advocacy in Action) is an international advocacy organization working towards justice and equality for trans, gender diverse and intersex communities.

³⁷ ILGA-Europe (Equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex people in Europe) are an independent, international non-governmental umbrella organisation bringing together over 600 organisations from 54 countries in Europe and Central Asia.

³⁸ Kuhar & Paternotte (2017): *Anti-gender campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against equality*. Rowman & Littlefield, pp.264-65.

CitizenGO and the Lunacek report

In February 2014, the European Parliament adopted the report on the EU Roadmap to combat homophobia and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, also known as the Lunacek Report. The resolution called on the European Commission and member states to develop a "comprehensive policy to protect the fundamental rights of LGBTI people" in the form of a multi-year action plan or strategy. Organised in particular under the auspices of the French "Manif pour tous", the report's namesake initiator, Austrian MEP Ulrike Lunacek, was bombarded with approximately 40,000 hate messages. Furthermore, more than 200,000 signatures were collected against the report via an online petition on CitizenGO.¹

¹ Arte: *CitizenGO – Gegen die Gleichstellung von Homosexuellen* (15.03.2015).

to have over 4.5 million followers. CitizenGO is also described as the “spearhead” in the fight against equality for LGBTIQ* persons.³⁹

It is known that women and girls as well as LGBTIQ* persons are particularly affected by this kind of gender-specific cyber violence. However, there is a lack of systematic data collection. According to a study by the Economist⁴⁰ published in March 2021, 74 per cent of women in Europe have experienced cyber violence online. Globally, the figure is as high as 85 per cent. Hate speech was reported by 65 per cent worldwide. However, the figures are difficult to collect because only one in four women report the incidents. 78 per cent said they did not know that this possibility existed.

Women are affected by hate speech online, often by the mere fact “that they are visible on the net”.⁴¹ When it comes to the issue of cyber violence and gender-based violence, the focus is often exclusively on the social group “women”. This disregards the intersectional perspective: that different types of discrimination reinforce and intersect each other. In fact, women – being a social, non-homogeneous group – are already exposed to very different experiences of discrimination (age, disabilities, migration background etc.). In addition to this, gender-based violence also targets changing or queer gender identities.⁴² Amnesty International observes in 2018 that women of colour, women of religious or ethnic minorities, lesbian, bisexual, trans or intersex women, women with disabilities or non-binary persons not meeting the traditional gender norms of men and women face online violence that affects them in particular.⁴³

Recently, on 16 September 2021, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling on the European Commission to list gender-based violence as a new cross-border area of crime under Article 83(1) TFEU.⁴⁴ The article grants the EU far-reaching possibilities for harmonising criminal law. The European Parliament and the Council can thus adopt minimum rules establishing criminal offences and penalties in the national criminal law of the member states in areas of particularly serious crime. Areas of crime already recognised are, among others, terrorism, trafficking in human beings, or money laundering. Depending on the development of crime, further areas of crime can be designated.⁴⁵ In its work programme for 2022, the European Commission announced a possible revision of the victims’ rights Directive or another legislative instrument may be proposed by the end of 2022. The aim is to improve access to justice and compensation, including for victims of gender-based violence.⁴⁶

Female politicians, especially when representing gender equality, reproductive and sexual rights and LGBTIQ* rights, are in particular attacked with hate speech. For example, a 2018 regional survey by the Inter-Parliamentary Union shows that 58 per cent of MPs or their staff surveyed had been sexually attacked on social media, and almost 47 per cent had received death or rape threats. The attacks are mostly perpetrated on social media platforms, such as twitter.⁴⁷ In the following, Dr Hannah Neumann, Member of the European Parliament, responds to the question of whether and how the rise of the anti-gender movement specifically affects her work as politician at the European level.

Dr Hannah Neumann holds a PhD in peace and conflict studies and is a politician for the German Green Party (Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen). Since 2019, she has been an elected Member of the European Parliament (MEP) as part of the Green / EFA group. In the context of her parliamenta-

39 Arte: CitizenGO – Gegen die Gleichstellung von Homosexuellen (15.03.2015).

40 The Economist Intelligence Unit (2021): Study *Measuring the prevalence of cyber violence against women* (online).

41 Frey, Regina (2020): *Geschlecht und Gewalt im digitalen Raum. Eine qualitative Analyse der Erscheinungsformen, Betroffenheiten und Handlungsmöglichkeiten unter Berücksichtigung intersektionaler Aspekte. Expert opinion for the Third Gender Equality Report of the German Federal Government*, p. 1.

42 Frey 2020: 5 f., c.f. also Mosene (2021): *Antifeminismus und die Fortschreibung von Marginalisierungen in digitalen Räumen. Blog interdisziplinäre Geschlechterforschung* (online).

43 Amnesty International (2018): *Online Violence against Women, Chapter 2* (online).

44 European Parliament resolution of 16 September 2021 with recommendations to the Commission on *identifying gender-based violence as a new area of crime listed in Article 83(1) TFEU* (2021/2035(INL)).

45 Article 83 TFEU.

46 ANNEX II of the European Commission’s working programme 2022, p. 12.

47 Inter-Parliamentary Union (2018): *Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe* (online).

Currently in the European Parliament: Gender-related violence against women and girls as well as LGBTIQ* persons as a criminal act

The background to this resolution is, on the one hand, the continuing blockade of some EU member states, including Poland and Hungary, towards the accession of the EU to the Istanbul Convention¹. Commission President Ursula von der Leyen had named this accession as one of the most important priorities of the European Commission. However, in the event of failure, she announced early on and repeated several times² that she would include violence against women in the list of criminal offences laid down in the treaty. Most recently, von der Leyen announced that the Commission will propose legislation by the end of the year to combat violence against women, including online and offline prevention, protection, and effective prosecution.³ On the other hand, the European Commission’s LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025, published in November 2020, announced that the Commission will present an initiative in 2021 to extend the list of crimes to include hate crimes and hate speech, including those directed against LGBTIQ persons.

The European Parliament’s resolution was adopted by 427 votes in favour, 119 against and 140 abstentions. It is also based on the study “**Combating gender-based violence: Cyber violence**” published in March 2021 by the European Parliament’s Scientific Service. The study analyses the added value of legislative measures against gender-based cyber violence and finds that there are no adequate measures at national or European level to combat this transnational area of crime.

1 *The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), signed in Istanbul in 2011 and entering into force in 2014, is to date the most far-reaching internationally legally binding instrument to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence.*

Cf. Infobox *Accession of the European Union to the Istanbul Convention*.

2 *See for instance: A Union that strives for more – political guidelines for the next European Commission 2019–2024 of September 2019; A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 of 05 March 2020 (COM(2020) 152 final), p. 4.*

3 *State of the Union address by President von der Leyen of 15 September 2021.*

ry work – for instance by means of *parliamentary questions, plenary speeches and co-submitted resolutions* – she publicly advocates for human rights issues, in particular for a feminist EU foreign policy that promotes gender equality and combats violence against women.

Appearing in public as a woman means being confronted with hatred early on: For me, it started when I was hanging up posters for the Bundestag elections in Berlin-Lichtenberg. If I was mobbed there, it was by men – and that is still the case today. It continues online: In 2018, when I pointed out on Twitter the lack of diversity in the leadership team of Horst Seehofer’s Ministry of the Interior, I became the target of a wave of hate comments for the first time, including threats of murder and rape.



Twitter @HNeumannMEP

Through my work as an MEP, I now have even greater visibility, and so the attacks are increasing, too. Most recently, I was targeted by the AfD when I called for ISIS supporters with European citizenship to be brought back from Kurdish prison camps to be tried here. The AfD group in the European Parliament created an inflammatory meme, and a flood of hate comments erupted.

However, the anti-gender movement does not only affect me personally, it also affects the content of my work: Hungary and Poland are constantly trying to erase the term “gender” from EU documents.⁴⁸ The European “Gender Action Plan III”, which sets the framework for promoting gender equality in the EU’s external action, was actually supposed to be adopted by the Council of the EU; but this was prevented by those two countries. Likewise, Hungary refuses to provide data for the #SHEcurity index which I launched and which maps the development of the proportion of women in different countries in areas such as diplomacy, the military, or the police forces.

Targeting female politicians is a popular tactic to silence women. Sexual innuendo and rape threats are almost exclusively directed against women. This is exacerbated for people with a migrant background or people from the LGBTQIA+ community.

In reaction to the attacks, I contacted HateAid, a digital violence counselling service. HateAid screens hate comments and takes legal action if necessary. The proceeds from this benefit the organisation. It is important to me to be a member of a party that clearly positions itself for women’s rights and demands women’s quotas, for example. The more women demand positions of power, the more “normal” it becomes to see women in positions of power.

The anti-gender movement relies on women being deterred by hatred, and unfortunately this works to some extent. However, problems arise for our democracy if not everyone has the same opportunities for political participation. For me, therefore, the following rule applies: I do not want the haters to win. That is why I keep going – and I am happy to do so even louder.

48 See Infobox: Disputes around the term “gender” in official documents.

Project Design

The Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe is a project at the Institute for Social Work and Social Education (ISS). The team of the Observatory analyses sociopolitical developments in Europe and their potential impact on Germany. We publish working papers on relevant sociopolitical topics, monitor European social policies and organise European Expert Meetings. The aim of our work is to connect key sociopolitical actors across Europe, promote the exchange of expertise and foster mutual learning. The Observatory is funded by the German Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ).

Publishing Information

Publisher:

Institute for Social Work and Social Education
 Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe
 Office Address: Zeilweg 42, D-60439 Frankfurt am Main
 +49 (0)69 - 95 78 9-0
 Berlin location: Lahnstraße 19, D-12055 Berlin
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The German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 11018 Berlin, provides funding for the project “Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe”. This publication does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany. The publishing institute and/or the authors of individual articles bear responsibility for its content.

The agency responsible for the Observatory is:
 Institute for Social Work and Social Education

Design: www.avitamin.de

Translation: Tim Steins

Date of publication: December 2021

This is a publication of the Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe and may be downloaded at: www.sociopolitical-observatory.eu.

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