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The International Activity of Ordo Iuris. The Central European Actor and the Global Christian Right

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Abstract: Much of the research dedicated to recent political changes in Poland emphasises the conservative agenda pursued by the ruling Law and Justice party. Many of the articles briefly mention Ordo Iuris (OI). This non-governmental organisation, established in 2013, deserves a proper analysis as it presents a rare success story of an actor pursuing a pro-life agenda from Poland which is not officially affiliated with the local Catholic Church. Ordo Iuris is not only able to influence domestic socio-political dynamics but has also developed a capacity to act beyond Poland's borders. This paper focuses on OI's international activity with two goals in mind. Firstly, it shows how OI—with its narrative, methods and actions—fits into the broader phenomenon of the Global Christian Right. In this regard, the paper draws attention to the similarities as well as the specificities of this Central European NGO. Secondly, it discusses the consequences of entanglement in politics for Ordo Iuris's agenda.

Keywords: Global Christian Right; Ordo Iuris; Poland; conservatism; Central Europe



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1. Introduction

Poland has often been discussed as a case of the strong politicisation of religion (Ingelhart and Norris 2011, pp. 111–32; Diskin 2001; Hruby 1982–1983; Borowik and Ramet 2017; Dośpiał-Borysiak 2019). In recent years the country has generated interest among social scientists because of the political populism of the conservative brand. Numerous articles have been published about the changes that have taken place since the Law and Justice party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) took power in 2015. Authors have focused on the government's policies, which aim at building a top-down conservative civil society, the process of replacing the old elite, biopolitics and the illiberal reshaping of state institutions (Bluhm and Varga 2019; Yatsyk 2020; Marczewski 2018; Bill 2020; Kotwas and Kubik 2019). In contrast to the government-centred perspective, this article draws attention to dynamics at the grassroots level. It tackles the nexus of religion and politics by analysing the international activity of the Ordo Iuris Institute for Legal Culture (hereinafter: Ordo Iuris, OI). This is a non-governmental pro-life organisation established in Poland in 2013 which, partially due to the rise of PiS to power, has since then succeeded in developing its own international network. Ordo Iuris presents a success story which is, on the one hand, part and parcel of the changes taking place in Poland. On the other hand, it should be seen in the context of the broader phenomenon of the Global Christian Right (hereinafter: GCR), i.e., a network of Christian Right pro-life organisations cooperating in the international arena.

This article has two goals. First, it aims to demonstrate how OI—with its narrative, methods and actions—fits into the GCR. The comparison helps to shed further light on the similarities but also to identify and explain the Central European specifics of Ordo Iuris's actions. The second goal is to reflect on the entanglement of this non-governmental faith-based actor in politics; to show what means it uses to access politics and influence the government's foreign agenda. At the same time, the reverse process is discussed, i.e., how OI is affected by its exposure to the political game. Since the special issue is dedicated to the

politicisation of religion and global developments, this article focuses on the international activity of OI. For this reason, it does not discuss OI's budget, staff policy or initiatives limited to Poland. The domestic context appears only when it is required to understand OI's international activity.

The article enriches the growing body of literature on religion and politics by discussing the entanglement of a non-state pro-life actor in politics, where religion is not merely a tool but the reason for action. The contribution of the text is twofold. Firstly, based on original material, it offers an in-depth analysis of an organisation which plays a noticeable role in changes taking place not only in Poland but across the Central European region. For this reason, the case of *Ordo Iuris*, which has so far been rather neglected by scholars, is worth studying in its own right. It has become the most successful pro-life Polish institution to have developed international activity. It is a new type of player with a clearly defined normative agenda in the conservative–right wing segment of Polish civil society.

Secondly, the article adds to the research on the GCR by discussing the specifics of Central European pro-life agents which until now were overshadowed in the scholarly works by their Western European and American counterparts (Buss and Herman; Camus and Lebourg). The article presents the “Central European angle” of OI's international activity to highlight the features which distinguish OI. They are particularly important due to the fact that they reveal OI's geopolitical thinking and its entanglement in politics. The article offers the perspective of a local player from a semi-peripheral country which was inspired by and learnt from the GCR and, finally, gained access to this network. Presenting OI adds the vertical view of a newcomer to the horizontal logic of the network. This is a valid contribution which enriches our understanding of the GCR described in the works of Clifford Bob or Doris Bus and Didi Herman. While these authors provided the characteristic of a then still emerging global phenomenon, this article focuses not on the dynamics within the network but on how a single actor is attempting to join and how it benefits from contacts with the GCR. This article reveals that, contrary to so many Western pro-life organisations, *Ordo Iuris* has not expanded abroad in order to raise its prestige at home (Bob 2012, p. 5). It has developed international activity because it saw it as the only way to prevent undesired changes (or cause beneficial ones) in Poland, whose sovereignty it sees as limited by its EU membership. While OI's international activity is growing, its priorities are chiefly connected to Poland. Last but not least, the article demonstrates that it is not only the GCR which uses local pro-life organisations to influence the politics of particular countries (Bob 2012, p. 11). The case of OI proves that local faith-based actors, also, are capable of using the global network to legitimise policies of their governments in the international arena.

2. Methods

The article aims to demonstrate the international activity of the Polish faith-based actor within the context of the Global Christian Right. Therefore, it uses the methods applied in other academic works which deal with the phenomenon of the GCR. A considerable number of them are empirical (e.g., Bob; Buss and Herman; Camus and Lebourg; Drolet and Williams). The authors perform an analysis of the narrative and actions of particular actors which, in turn, allows them to formulate more general observations. Clifford Bob made two conceptual points in his book. Firstly, he argued that networks are shifting and loose-knit and suggested that the focus should be on particular actors (Bob 2012, p. 8). Secondly, he emphasised that each transnational network consists of local actors rooted in domestic politics. This is a reason to include this level of analysis in research on the GCR (Bob 2012, pp. 8–11). These recommendations are followed here. OI's narratives and actions are analysed to reconstruct the complex picture of its international activity. Additionally, it is contextualised by showing the connection between OI's international agenda and Polish politics, which is referred to as “entanglement in politics”. The goal of the article is not to trace the inner dynamics of the GCR, which has already been described

in the literature. Instead, the article presents a case study of a particular actor—a local Polish NGO which, inspired by the GCR, developed its own international activity and started to build a regional network in Central Europe using the methods of the GCR.

Achieving the two general goals (an analysis of OI and the GCR and an account of OI's political entanglement) requires first and foremost a detailed analysis of Ordo Iuris, allowing a comparison to be made with other GCR actors. Therefore, in pursuance of the two goals, the author of the article seeks answers to the following questions: (1) What makes OI a new type of faith-based actor in Poland? (2) What is OI's vision of international processes? (3) What kind of language (narrative) and instruments does OI use in its international activity? (4) How does OI (in its narrative and methods) correspond to the GCR? (5) What is specific about OI's international activity in comparison to the GCR? (6) What is the reason for OI's focus on the Central European region? (7) How does entanglement in politics influence OI's international agenda? (8) What role does the GCR play in OI's political entanglement? Tackling these questions allows reductionism to be avoided and highlights the complex dynamic in which the local actor (OI) aspires to a global network, is a regional player and is entangled domestically.

The analysis is based on the rich set of materials published on the official webpage of the organisation (ordoiuris.pl). It includes articles, interviews, reports, legal analyses and videos from the time period 2013–2021. Articles about Ordo Iuris published in the press are used as an additional source. Unfortunately, despite the repeated requests of the author, the management of OI did not agree to comment on the activity of their organisation. Nevertheless, it was possible to talk to four people well acquainted with the practices of OI who did not agree, however, to disclose their identity. Information obtained through these conversations is used as a supplemental source and enabled a better contextualisation of the data officially published by OI, which is the primary source. In order to reconstruct OI's vision of international processes and the instruments of its activity abroad, the author conducted a critical analysis of its narrative and examined OI's actions. The findings were compared to the narrative and tools characteristic of the GCR described in the existing body of literature.

The article starts with opening remarks about the international activity of faith-based actors and the GCR which provide the necessary context for the analysis of OI as a part of this particular phenomenon. It is followed by a short description of the genesis and normative identity of Ordo Iuris. Next, the similarities in the vision, language and methods of the GCR and OI are discussed with the emphasis on what is specific about OI's international agenda—its “Central European angle”. The last point is dedicated to the entanglement of OI in politics.

3. Faith-Based Actors Go Global: Introductory Remarks

When the Second World War ended, social science was dominated by the conviction that the secularisation of societies is an inevitable product of modernity perpetuated by industrialisation and urbanisation (Taylor 2018). Most students of politics drawn to the clash of democracy and communism lost interest in religion as a factor capable of influencing political processes. Only in the 1980s, with the cases of the revolution in Iran (in 1979) or the phenomenon of Solidarność in Poland (in 1980), did the role of religion in politics start to be seriously reconsidered (Berger 1999). Meanwhile, technological progress, especially in the era of communication, allowed regional dynamics to have a truly global impact. The growing interdependence of nations strengthened by global processes created new opportunities for non-state actors which developed capacities to act beyond the territory of a single country (Risse 2002; Keck and Sikkink 1998). These agents learned how to influence the national and international agenda by being active in international organisations, building transregional advocacy networks and mobilising societies. The participation of grassroots actors in global processes was seen by liberals as a positive development which could lead to the establishment of a global civil society (Bob 2012, p. 4). Meanwhile many faith-based actors engaged in politics and grouped on

the right flank of the political arena in Europe and the US observed these changes with unease. Globalisation was perceived as a phenomenon which spread secularism (Buss and Herman 2003, p. 37). In their study, Jean-François Drolet and Michael C. Williams showed how the initial passive resistance turned into a revolutionary call for action and gave rise to the New Right (Drolet and Williams 2018). Many-faith based actors have joined this cause. Their international activity was studied by Doris Buss and Didi Herman, who used the term 'Christian Right' (CR). As they explained, it referred to "a broad range of American organizations that have tended to form coalitions, both domestic and international, around an orthodox Christian vision and a defense of the traditional nuclear family formation, referred to by the CR as the 'natural family'" (Buss and Herman 2003, p. xviii). Already in 2003, the scholars were arguing that Christian Right activism at the international level presented "an emerging international, or perhaps more accurately, 'global', political space" (Buss and Herman 2003, p. 130). Almost two decades later it seems safe to talk about the global phenomenon of cooperation between Christian Right organisations across different continents. This includes the formation of coalitions and the building of networks to promote their normative agendas centred around pro-life issues. CR actors have created advocacy networks, i.e., networks of actors who share specific values, principled beliefs, a common discourse and strategies (Risse 2002, p. 25). To emphasise the truly global dimension of this complex collaboration of Christian Right pro-life organisations in the international arena I use the term 'Global Christian Right'.

How does the GCR view international processes? In this milieu, globalisation is not merely a result of economic interdependence but an end product of liberal ideology. According to the GCR, the coalition of socialists, feminists and ecologists is inspired by Marxism. It strives to spread secularism and create a new world order (Drolet and Williams 2019; Buss and Herman 2003, pp. 35–44). To achieve their goal, the leftists have taken over international organisations and changed international law from an instrument regulating interstate relations into a tool managing contacts between the state and the individual (Drolet and Williams 2018, p. 299). This is how human rights have come to be used as a means of strengthening sexual minorities and undermining the role of the traditional family. The clash around human rights reveals the new progressive tone in the discourse of the GCR, which opposes the universalistic interpretation and calls for religion and traditional values to be recognised as crucial parts of human rights. According to the GCR, the universalistic interpretation advanced by liberals is in fact yet another manifestation of Western imperialism which imposes its own vision on other nations. Meanwhile, referring to religion and traditional values while interpreting human rights helps to protect civilisational diversity (Stoeckl and Medvedeva 2018). This is just one example of how the GCR uses the main concepts of liberal discourse in order to oppose the liberal agenda (Drolet and Williams 2019). GCR organisations have created a counterhegemonic discourse in which they present themselves as protectors of the persecuted minority of believers, and, as such, they stand for the true spirit of democratic pluralism heavily curtailed by the leftists and their disingenuous political correctness (Marczewski 2018). The GCR talks about the rule of law and freedom of speech. Finally, it emphasises the need to defend state sovereignty as a necessary condition of protecting the traditional family from the pressure of the international liberal coalition (Drolet and Williams 2019; Buss and Herman 2003). One of the *bêtes noires* of the leftist global agenda is George Soros, who, with his projects all over the world, works behind the scenes and catches nation states off guard (Marczewski 2018, p. 53).

This worldview translates into concrete actions. In response to the threats, the GCR started to develop its own international activity with the goal of pushing back against the leftists, taking control of globalisation and creating an alternative order (Drolet and Williams 2019). The faith-based actors have gone global. Numerous organisations have created advocacy networks and have made successful attempts to participate in international institutions—above all, in the United Nations. The turning point came with the UN conferences in Cairo (1994, on Population) and Beijing (1995, on Women), where a coalition

of Christian Right organisations defended the position of developing countries against “the Western imperialism” (Buss and Herman 2003, pp. 44–45).

These two developments, i.e., (1) advancing the pro-life agenda in international organisations and (2) creating a counterhegemonic discourse which uses liberal ideas, have contributed to strengthening faith-based legal advocacy actors. Many organisations from the GCR, e.g., the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ and its offshoot European Centre for Law and Justice, ECLJ), the Center for Family and Human Rights (C-Fam) and Americans United for Life and the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), have specialised in legal actions as an efficient way of influencing the normative order at home and in the international arena. The legal approach works well within the liberal framework centred around protecting rights and the rule of law. For these actors it is characteristic to define their mission as first and foremost defending the legal order (i.e., the accurate reading of the law) and even downplaying references to religion. C-Fam, for example, used to be known as the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute, but now its official name is the Center for Family and Human Rights, with no mention made of its religious affiliation (Bob 2012, p. 43). C-Fam presents itself as a “non-partisan, non-profit research institute dedicated to reestablishing a proper understanding of international law, protecting national sovereignty and the dignity of the human person . . .”. It sees its mission as publishing and promoting “scholarship related to the proposition that the UN and other international institutions harm a true understanding of international law and in the process undermine the family and other institutions man requires for a just, free and happy life.” (About C-Fam n.d.).

The faith-based legal advocacy actors, as Clifford Bob accurately noticed, play a “watch-dog role, eyeing, sizing up, and attacking its enemies and their ideas” (Bob 2012, p. 43). They monitor changes in law in different countries and sound the alert whenever an initiative emerges which, according to their judgment, undermines the traditional family. They mount political and media campaigns (e.g., online petitions). They also promote their own legal solutions (e.g., draft legal acts) and form coalitions of support within the GCR to exert pressure on national and international lawmakers. Trying to influence the law in a particular country, CR actors search for local pro-life organisations to whom they offer support (financial, organisational or legal expertise). In this way the GCR keeps expanding its network into new countries.

In their struggle in the international arena against “the leftists”, the faith-based legal advocacy actors use “lawyerly techniques of investigation, argumentation, and litigation” (Bob 2012, p. 75). The success of the American CR inspired European pro-life organisations. The instruments characteristic of American legal practice, such as *amicus curiae* briefs¹, have started to feature in trials in Europe due to the involvement of American faith-based actors (Bob 2012, p. 86). Among the know-how the American NGOs shared with their European counterparts, one could also mention litigating, lobbying, electioneering and linking to transnational networks (Bob 2012, pp. 74–106). It seems that this particular legal type of Christian Right organisation has become an inspiration for *Ordo Iuris*. Only within this context is it possible to note that *OI* is not just another local NGO rooted in the Polish tradition and entangled in domestic politics, but a new kind of actor which has been inspired and to a certain extent formed by the GCR.

4. *Ordo Iuris*: A New Type of Faith-Based Actor in Poland

In the studies dedicated to the Christian Right, Poland has usually been mentioned as a case where the government is pursuing a conservative agenda with the support of the Catholic Church (Camus and Lebourg 2017, p. 175). The best-known faith-based non-state actor with political clout has been the group within the Church connected to Radio Maryja headed by Father Tadeusz Rydzyk (Żurek 2009). However, this institution has never exhibited any serious international ambitions and focuses on Polish affairs. Camus and Lebourg concluded that radical Catholics in Poland, instead of establishing

their own political movements, prefer to advance their agenda by cooperating with the main right-wing party (Camus and Lebourg 2017, pp. 174–75).

The last decade has seen a new development among Polish non-governmental organisations which could be classified as part of the GCR. Ordo Iuris is a good example of this. While it is true that OI seeks ways to influence politics by lobbying with the ruling right-wing party, it has also built up a capacity to act beyond Poland's borders and is well anchored in the European Christian pro-life network. Furthermore, Ordo Iuris is not affiliated with the Catholic Church. The latter has never defined its official position towards OI but rather keeps its distance.²

Ordo Iuris is a faith-based actor, although its case is intriguing because of how it frames its identity. The organisation does not refer directly to the teachings of the Church or Christianity. There are no strictly religious symbols in its materials. In the official note on the webpage, in a manner similar to C-Fam's, OI declares that it is “an independent legal organization incorporated as a foundation in Poland. It gathers academics and legal practitioners with the aim of promoting a legal culture based on respect for human dignity and rights. Ordo Iuris pursues its objectives by means of research and other academic activities, as well as advocacy and litigation” (Who We Are 2021). It presents itself as an NGO dealing exclusively with legal issues. Nevertheless, there are good reasons to consider OI a faith-based legal advocacy actor. The three main reasons are: its origins, the norms which underpin the desired legal order and the actions which clearly indicate that it is not only concerned with guarding the Polish constitutional order.

The origins of OI have been described in detail elsewhere (Piątek 2017; Suchanow 2020; Lebel et al. 2020; Gielewska et al. 2020). However, the following brief summary of the most important facts suffices to illustrate, why the origins of OI can be a solid argument for its classification as a faith-based actor. OI was established by the Piotr Skarga Institute for Social and Religious Education Foundation (hereinafter: Piotr Skarga Foundation) which was brought to life in 2001 by the Piotr Skarga Association for Christian Culture. The establishment of the latter in 1999 was inspired by Tradition, Family and Property (TFP)—a network of Catholic radicals, founded in the 1960s in Brazil by Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira, with contacts among the American Christian Right (Mierzyńska 2020; Suchanow 2020, pp. 407–29; Bob 2012, pp. 156–59).³ In the Piotr Skarga Foundation people connected to TFP sat on the supervisory board (Gielewska et al. 2020). According to the legal founding act of OI, the Piotr Skarga Foundation is entitled to initiate and control the activity of Ordo Iuris (Statut Fundacji 2021). Members of the foundation sit on OI's supervisory board (Suchanow 2020, pp. 497–500). Hence, although OI presents itself as an organisation for legal culture, it cannot escape the fact that it is tightly connected to an institution established to spread the Christian faith and defend traditional values.

The second argument in favour of viewing OI as a faith-based actor is connected to the values which lay at the foundation of the legal order which it favours. In the official information on their webpage OI admits, “Everyday people are confronted with various radical ideologies that aggressively question the existing social order. Such ideologies are not aimed at improving or healing society, but instead seek to destroy its very foundation . . . Law is too complex a subject to be presented as a mere set of rules or invoking only the authority of natural law. Lawyer involvement in the law has to take into consideration the context created by extralegal regulatory systems, the practice of law and, more broadly, the whole culture. This is why Ordo Iuris is the Institute for Legal Culture”. A careful analysis of the materials published by OI makes it possible to identify a set of norms which the organisation finds crucial. They are connected to the idea of the traditional family, marriage as a union between a man and a woman, and the condemnation of abortion, “gender ideology” and the “privileging” of sexual minorities. In 2018 OI recommended that Polish delegates to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) support Spanish judge María Elósegui Ichaso for the European Tribunal of Human Rights. OI argued that “as a lawyer she shows a commitment to basic values which lie at the heart of the European legal order, such as respect for the life of unborn children, marriage as a union of a man

and woman and the family as an elementary unit of social life. In her publications she rejected equating homosexual relationships with marriages and opposed international programs which promoted abortion and imposed sexual education on children from African countries" ([Wybór sędziego 2018](#)). The consultative status at the UN ECOSOC is, in the words of the deputy director of OI, Joanna Banasiuk, "an important instrument in the struggle for crucial values such as the protection of life at each its stage as well as the identity of marriage . . ." ([Ordo Iuris uzyskało status konsultacyjny 2017](#)). Hence the interest of OI is clearly centred around the pro-life agenda which is embraced by the GCR and, as Buss and Herman showed, it has a Christian foundation ([Buss and Herman 2003](#), pp. 2–9). OI does not fight for any legal order other than the one which is anchored in the Christian tradition.

The third argument in favour of viewing OI as a faith-based actor makes reference to its actions, which are not limited to guarding the Polish Constitution. For instance, the organisation became involved in campaigns calling for the protection of Christians in the Middle East ([Ordo Iuris apeluje do Prezydenta 2017](#)). Furthermore, a look into OI's main partners in its international activity leaves no doubt about its normative identity. OI cooperates with leading agents of the GCR, such as the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), the European Centre for Law and Justice, C-Fam and the Alliance Defending Freedom.⁴ These institutions were named as an inspiring example by OI analyst Karina Bosak.⁵ She said that, by acquiring consultative status at the UN, OI found itself "among actors such as the European Centre for Law and Justice and the Alliance Defending Freedom, which shows that Ordo Iuris has quickly joined the ranks of the world's leading organisations that influence the work of the United Nations social affairs agenda" ([Ordo Iuris uzyskało status konsultacyjny](#)). This quotation highlights the significance of the GCR for OI, which is inspired by influential pro-life NGOs with a legal profile and learns from them by emulating their methods.

Just like its abovementioned partners, Ordo Iuris can be considered a faith-based legal advocacy organisation. The people who were interviewed by the author confirmed that traditional values rooted in the Christian tradition are of central concern to OI. They are frequently mentioned as a reason for actions during debates among members of the organisations. The interlocutors considered the NGO a faith-based actor and talked about it as "Polish C-Fam". The fact that OI is so reluctant to accept this label could be explained as part of the strategy of an NGO operating in what it perceives to be a hostile environment dominated by leftists ([Suchanow 2020](#), pp. 341–42).⁶ A legal profile creates an image of an ideologically impartial institution guided by the constitution. This image is more convenient for operating in a public space ruled by liberal discourse. This ambiguous identity is one of four novel features which distinguishes OI from other Polish faith-based actors. The second novel feature of OI is its indirect but indicative connection to the foreign "founding fathers", i.e., TFP. The Brazilian network learned from American Christian Right and functioned as a "transmission belt" of the know-how for its Polish institutional offspring ([Lebel et al. 2020](#)). The decision of the Piotr Skarga Foundation to establish a unit specialised in legal expertise also reveals the inspiring effect of the GCR, especially the legal advocacy organisations. Adopting a legal profile for a faith-based actor is the third novel feature of OI, while the fourth and final one is its international activity. The vision of the global processes, the language and the methods used by OI place it with the GCR.

5. Ordo Iuris and the Global Christian Right: Joint Vision, Familiar Methods

Presented below is an account of how OI fits into the GCR phenomenon. Its vision of the global processes, its language with its emphasis on the dominant liberal discourse, as well as the methods used by OI to promote its initiatives, are discussed. The analysis reveals that OI shares the GCR's agenda and emulates its methods.

The official material issued by OI presents a *vision* of the world which is characteristic of the GCR. According to OI, international organisations, as well EU institutions, have been dominated by leftists. "For years the UN has been the field of the expansion of feminist

ideology”—so it is stated in the commentary on the 61st Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (UN CSW) in 2017 (Sukces [środowisk 2017](#)). In the same year OI was calling on Polish citizens to “defend human dignity from the actions of leftists who have colonised UN structures” (Ordo Iuris [do ONZ 2017](#)). This appeal indicates the proactive approach which rejects a passive stance in favour of a *reconquista* of the international forums in the spirit of the New Right (Drolet and Williams 2018). To expose the purported dominance of Marxists, OI reprinted a report prepared by the European Centre for Law and Justice (an important CR actor with a legal profile). It claimed to reveal the pressure exercised by left-leaning NGOs, such as the Open Society Foundation or companies such as Microsoft, on international organisations, mostly the United Nations, the Council of Europe and WHO. This, according to OI, “seriously questions the independence of these organisations” (Niejasne [powiązania 2020](#)).

Similarly to the GCR, Ordo Iuris sees a close connection between national sovereignty and protecting the traditional family. While commenting on the UN Summit in Bangkok of 2015, OI wrote about “the matters of highest importance for Poland’s sovereignty, i.e., the protection of human life at the early stage as well as protection of the constitutional rights of parents” (Obywatele [wzywają 2015](#)). The video recorded in English with the appeal against the Istanbul Convention⁷ featured the slogan “hands off the traditional family, hands off national sovereignty” (Węgierskie Centrum Praw 2020). The link between family and sovereignty is strengthened by the principle of the rule of law. In 2021 in reaction to the resolution issued by the European Parliament critical of the decision of the Polish Constitutional Tribunal on the abortion law, OI filed a complaint to the European Tribunal of Justice that the parliament had overstepped its competences and hence violated the rule of law and the sovereignty of member states (Jest [skarga 2021](#)).

As concerns the *language* used by OI, there are two different styles: militant and legal. The militant style features a pro-life agenda which is concerned with resisting the ideological offensive of the left. There is talk of the “abortive killing of unborn babies” (Reakcja Ordo Iuris 2018), “forcing through the pseudo-right to abortion” (Komitet Praw Człowieka 2018) or “gender ideology originating in Marxism” (Skrajna ideologia 2020). OI called the 61st Session of the UN CSW “a true battlefield, where the radicals pushing gender equality, privileges for LGBTIQ people and abortion as one of ‘reproductive and sexual rights’ were confronted by the defenders of life, marriage and family rights” (Sukces [środowisk 2017](#)).

The second style is characterised by legal jargon characteristic of a legal advocacy organisation from the GCR. The documents are full of references to legal acts, which creates an impression of ideological impartiality and professionalism. For instance, the notion of a “right to abortion” is criticised not from a moral position but as a “drastic abuse of international law” (Proaborcyjne media 2017). Additionally, OI, like many representatives of the GCR, refers to academic texts in its analysis, e.g., it quotes sociological data to prove that most cases of domestic violence happen not in marriages but in circumstances of cohabitation (Zych 2018, p. 1; Buss and Herman 2003, p. 7). The militant and legal styles are interwoven in the liberal discourse, which is also characteristic of the GCR. OI stands not only for freedom of belief but also speech. The oldest post with references to OI’s international activity is about the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting which the OSCE held in Warsaw in Autumn 2013. During this event, OI organised a session which raised awareness about the threats to freedom of speech in Poland (O [zagrożeniach 2013](#)). As an example of bad practices, OI mentioned the anti-discrimination law drafted by the leftist parties (Ruch Palikota and SLD) in order, according to OI, to ban public criticism of “social pathologies” like the “subculture of minorities under the aegis of LGBTQ” (Piwar 2013).

Like the GCR, Ordo Iuris calls for protecting minorities. The Convention on the Rights of the Family which OI drafted as an alternative to the Istanbul Document has been presented as a legal act which aims to guarantee the “rights and freedoms of the most discriminated social group, i.e., the family” (Konwencja o [Prawach Rodziny 2018](#)).

Furthermore, OI fights for equal representation of different worldviews. It issued a petition addressed to the president of the European Parliament, Antonio Tajani, asking him to explain “the discriminatory practices” of the FEMM Commission,⁸ which, during its visit to Poland in May 2017 met only with “gender ideology organisations” and ignored pro-life groups (*Stop dyskryminacji* 2017). Opposing abortion in the case of the severe impairment of the foetus, OI raised this issue at the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (OHCHR) as a case of “discrimination of persons with disabilities in the prenatal stage” (*Ordo Iuris na forum ONZ* 2018). Using the framework of the liberal discourse, OI presents the right to abortion as a discriminatory act. Finally, OI stresses that it is committed to the rule of law. For OI, “the accurate reading of law” is a key argument in the discussion on human rights. Additionally, in this regard OI shares the position of the GCR (*Stoeckl and Medvedeva* 2018). While establishing a strategic partnership with the Hungarian legal think-tank the Center for Fundamental Rights, OI declared that their common goal is the “reintroduction of the accurate understanding of human rights in our countries as well as in the international arena. Today, when they are instrumentalised and radicals try to ascribe meanings to them which stand in striking opposition to their genuine content, creating a broad coalition in defence of basic values is especially important” (*Polsko-węgierska współpraca* 2020).

The *methods* used by OI in its international activity are an integral part of the GCR’s playbook (*Bob* 2012, pp. 21–35; *Buss and Herman* 2003). There are three types of tools used by the Polish NGO: (1) the formal status of the international organisations, (2) broadly understood legal actions and (3) international coalitions of support.

Starting with the first point, OI has taken steps to be involved with the international organisations crucial to the agenda of the GCR. As has already been stated, it has consultative status at the UN ECOSOC (since 2017). As it focuses on family issues, it is active at the UNHCR and CSW. It participates in the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM), Europe’s largest annual human rights conference, which brings together government officials, international experts, civil society representatives and human rights activists (*Ordo Iuris broni rodziny* 2018). It is also active at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) (*Surogacja bez poparcia* 2016). OI has official accreditation at the European Parliament and has opened an office in Brussels in the vicinity of the European institutions.⁹ As the deputy director of OI Joanna Banasiuk commented, “this is the best illustration of the unprecedented activity of our institute in the international arena” (*Ordo Iuris uzyskało status konsultacyjny*).

Concerning its legal activity, OI regularly monitors the debates and changes which take place in the law (mostly of European countries) connected to broadly understood family issues (marriage, abortion, domestic violence, “gender ideology” and LGBTQ “privileges”). It comments on them and takes action. It writes recommendations for politicians, prepares legal expertise or authors open letters and petitions (*Wybór sędziego*). It uses methods characteristic of the American Christian Right legal advocacy organisations, such as the above-mentioned *amici curiae* opinion or litigation.¹⁰ The latter is a reason why so many people are reluctant to talk about OI’s activity.¹¹

The crucial ingredient of OI’s success is its ability to build international coalitions in support of its own projects, which is in turn a result of its access to the GCR advocacy network. OI is present at the Civil Society for the Family lobbying platform created by C-Fam in 2016 (*Dauksza* 2021). It also belongs to “Agenda Europe”. According to press reports, this is “an informal group of about 350 NGOs working to defend the values of life, family and religious freedom” in which *Ordo Iuris* and the Alliance Defending Freedom play a leading role (*Suchanow* 2020, pp. 330–41; *Dauksza* 2021). The list of OI’s official partner organisations includes the European Centre for Law and Justice, C-Fam (US), Freedom for All (US), the Center for Fundamental Rights (Alapjogokért Központ, Hungary), Slovakia Christiana (Slovakia), the Human Rights and Family Policy Institute (Inštitút pre ľudské práva a rodinnú politiku, HFI, Slovakia), In the Name of the Family (U ime

Obitelj, Croatia), Ordo Iuris Croatia and the Society and Values Association (Assotsiatsiya Obshchestvo i Tsennosti, Bulgaria).

The significance of international networking is confirmed by the fact that the most publicised initiatives of OI received international backing from fellow pro-life organisations. Just before the Polish Constitutional Tribunal decided to make abortion law stricter, OI presented it with an *amici curiae* signed by three Slovak organisations (the Human Rights and Family Policy Institute (HFI), the Association for Life and the Family and Slovakia Christiana), two from Croatia (In the Name of the Family, Vigilare Foundation), two from the United States (Family Watch International, the Population Research Institute) and one each from Hungary, Lithuania, France and Italy (respectively, the Center for Fundamental Rights, the Free Society Institute-Laisvos visuomenės institutas, FSI, Femina Europa, Pro Vita & Famiglia), among others (Dauksza et al. 2020). The biggest success to date has been the initiative to undermine the Istanbul Convention and replace it with a new pro-life project, the Convention on the Rights of the Family. Countering an ideological project with one's own initiative is also a move from the GCR's playbook (Bob 2012, pp. 31–32). OI proudly announced that, together with “a coalition of experts and leaders of pro-life organisations from 11 countries we have launched a movement of protest”. This is an example of a successful GCR action initiated and coordinated by Ordo Iuris.

OI's public relations strategy is—as some of the people contacted for this article also suggested—arguably inflating the extent of its successes. Even if OI's announcements should be approached with some scepticism, it nevertheless remains true that in recent years it has managed to develop a capacity to act beyond Polish territory and built links to the Christian Right global network. The Polish local player inspired by the GCR turned out to be a quick learner. Using methods from the GCR's playbook, it has raised its visibility in the international fora and created links to the advocacy network. The access to the GCR brings OI prestige but, more importantly, it is a precious asset which can be used to form a coalition of support for OI's initiatives. Its vision, narrative and methods position Ordo Iuris within the GCR. However, there are also elements specific to OI which are presented below.

6. The Central European Angle of Ordo Iuris' International Agenda

There are two features which make OI stand out among Christian Right NGOs from Western Europe or the US: the focus on Central Europe and the attitude towards Russia. Both are revealed in OI's narrative, which is discussed below and is illustrated with its two strategic regional initiatives in the area of (1) education and (2) networking.

OI's specific interests in the region of Central Europe came into the spotlight when in Spring 2021 it officially inaugurated its new project:¹² a private law school named Collegium Intermarium. The school declared the ambition to become the main breeding ground for conservative intellectuals from Central Europe. The very notion “Intermarium” (pl. *Międzymorze*) is borrowed from the Polish geopolitical tradition and refers to a group of nations situated in Europe between three seas—the Baltic, Adriatic and Black seas (Curanović 2019). The core of the region defined in this manner consists of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, but it can also be identified more broadly with Central Europe, including Lithuania, Croatia or Romania.

The analysis of the materials published in connection to the Collegium allows a reconstruction of OI's vision of Central Europe. On the school's official webpage (collegiumintermarium.org), we read that “the interest in cooperation with these countries is not motivated solely by socio-economic prospects. Although the region still deals with the negative communist legacy, it is free of many of the problems which today trouble the Western part of the European continent” (Misja i wartości 2021). At the opening ceremony, rector Tymoteusz Zych (who is also the vice president of OI) emphasised what the nations in the region have in common. He said, “Today we face the challenge of securing true, multidimensional sovereignty. For the first time in hundreds of years we have a chance to create a unified space of cooperation for the sovereign countries of Intermarium. The

nations from this part of the world have a lot in common—they share a culture, respect for the past and a love for European heritage, which so many today try to undermine” (*Przestrzeń wolności i ładu* 2021). These two quotations are sufficient to reveal a narrative wherein Central Europe has a strong positive regional identity rooted in traditional values and is juxtaposed with “troubled” Western Europe where the true European heritage is being rejected. Hence a subtle but noticeable fault line—“us vs. them”—is drawn.

On the school’s official webpage it is also written that the nations associated with the Intermarium “love freedom but know all too well that it lasts only if it is rooted in order. We take our regional diversity as a value, not a problem, which should be dealt with by a forced standardisation from the top . . . Our nations have suffered a lot from externally imposed totalitarian systems—fascism and communism. Therefore, we distance ourselves from any social engineering” (*Misja i wartości*). Within this narrative, freedom-loving Central European nations are concerned about their sovereignty being undermined by an “external authority” which imposes normative standardisation and does not respect or understand regional diversity. “External authority” refers to the European institutions. However, the picture of the EU is not unambiguously negative. According to OI, the EU was a sound project when it was anchored in the ideas of Christian democracy, did not push for “ever closer union” and respected national sovereignty. OI is ready to fight to regain the true identity of the EU, as envisioned by the founding father Robert Schuman. Hence it does not call for leaving the EU (at least not officially) but stands for going back to its roots and, as with human rights, an “accurate reading” of the European Treaties (*Zalewski and Zych* 2021). Karolina Pawłowska from OI stated: “Although we witness the ever deepening crisis of the West, such initiatives [i.e., establishing Collegium Intermarium—A.C.] bring hope for a positive change and the revival of the values which used to be at the foundation of the West. There is hope that the negative changes which take place within the EU can be stopped and reversed . . . Only strong resistance and sticking to the rules contained in the European Treaties . . . can stop the drive for turning the EU into a superstate” (*Międzynarodowa koalicja* 2021). It is worth noting that, while writing about European heritage, OI does not use the civilisational discourse characteristic of other conservative actors and restricts itself to legal jargon.

The analysis of OI’s Central Europe narrative also reveals a missing element, i.e., Russia. This country has in recent years become the main promoter of the conservative agenda in the international arena (*Stoeckl* 2019; *Suslov and Uzlaner* 2019) but is absent from OI’s projects. Contrary to Hungarian or Slovak pro-life actors (*Nagy* 2021), OI not only does not seek cooperation with Russian conservatives but intentionally avoids initiatives associated with Moscow. The World Congress of Families (WCF) serves as a good example. One of its annual meetings took place in Warsaw in 2007 and was considered a rare international success of the Polish pro-life milieu (Suchanow, pp. 178–180). However, since the WCF started to be associated with Russia (*Stoeckl*), OI has kept a low profile at this particular forum.¹³ Among the numerous materials published on OI’s website there are only two connected to Russia. Neither was written by OI experts and they are both reprints of texts prepared by foreign pro-life organisations with legal profiles. One was authored by the European Centre for Law and Justice (in 2016) (*Projekt ustawy* 2016), the other by the Alliance Defending Freedom (in 2016) (*Rosyjska ustawa* 2016). The absence of Russia is striking but should not be considered coincidental. As the president of OI, Jerzy Kwaśniewski, explained, “The accusation of being a ‘Russian agent’ is often used in Poland against an opponent. Right now it’s used against us but there is no evidence which would make it possible to associate us with the ‘pro-Russian’ option” (*Kawczyńska* 2020). This statement would suggest that OI’s hesitancy concerning Russia has a pragmatic basis, since the stigma of being a “Russian agent” might become a kiss of death for an NGO operating in Poland. However, this may not be the only reason. People well acquainted with OI stated that its representatives simply do not believe in the Russian ruling elite’s commitment to traditional values and the pro-life agenda. As one person interviewed for this article put it, “post-Soviet Russia is not about Christian Orthodoxy but brutal *samoderzhaviye*,”¹⁴

nothing has changed in this regard". Hence it is not only about pragmatism. OI's approach toward Russia is rooted in the Polish tradition of mistrust towards its powerful neighbour. Keeping one's distance from Moscow sets OI apart from many other Christian Right NGOs which do cooperate with Russia (Shekhovtsov 2017). Nonetheless, OI's motivation is also slightly different from these western NGOs which feel uncomfortable about Russian authoritarianism (Stoeckl and Medvedeva 2018).

This hesitancy concerning Russia combined with building alliances in the immediate neighbourhood corresponds with Polish geopolitical thinking about Central Europe—the region where Poland should play the role of the leader in order to strengthen its own status within the EU, especially in relation to its two powerful neighbours: Germany and Russia. Geopolitical inspirations are also present in the ideas of the American Christian Right (Drolet and Williams 2019) and the case of OI merely confirms this link. The analysis of the actions of OI shows how this faith-based actor embraces the geopolitical logic in its international activity. Similar to the Polish government, OI approaches Central Europe as the springboard for building its own position in the GCR. What is more, creating its own base in Central Europe enables OI to lead a platform of pro-life NGOs which could support particular governments in the region in countering the "leftist agenda imposed by Brussels".

OI's actions in Central Europe are centred around networking and education. To start with the former, OI's attempts to create a regional pro-life advocacy network should be analysed in connection with initiatives undertaken by its founder, the Piotr Skarga Foundation. According to press reports, by 2017 there was a network of 40 organisations financially supported by this foundation. Almost half of them are located in Central and Eastern European countries (Gielewska et al. 2020). Among them there is: the Lithuanian Institute of Christian Culture (Krikščioniškosios Kultūros Institutas, KKI), the Estonian Foundation for the Protection of Family and Tradition (SAPTK), Slovakia Christiana, the Hungarian Foundation for a Christian Civilization and the Croatian Vigilare Foundation. The latter, together with OI, in 2019 established the Croatian Ordo Iuris Foundation. The Slovak Ordo Iuris was launched in 2020 and there were also plans to launch an Estonian counterpart (Gielewska et al. 2021). OI's activity could be interpreted as an attempt to recreate the GCR's network but on a regional scale. It is important to note that OI does not limit its actions to establishing partnership with local pro-life organisations but takes a proactive approach and sets up new institutions in Central European countries.

The process of building a regional pro-life network was crowned with the educational project, i.e., Collegium Intermarium. A day ahead of the school's inauguration, an international conference was organised in Warsaw by OI and its Hungarian partner, the Center for Fundamental Rights. The event, attended by representatives of regional NGOs, was thought of as an impulse for "an international network dedicated to protect the fundamental rights and values of Central Europe" (Międzynarodowa koalicja 2021). OI's prioritisation of international partnerships and attempts to create a regional pro-life network reveals the significance of the GCR as a role model.

The newly established school is to become an intellectual conservative hub for Central Europe. It is supposed to help to reach young people and counterbalance the influence of the leftists represented by Soros's educational projects (opposing Soros is yet another element of the GCR's strategy). It is also presented as a means of protecting the sovereignty of Central European countries which for "so long have been deprived of the possibility of having their own independent academic institutions" (Międzynarodowa koalicja 2021). Finally, the school aims to strengthen the regional advocacy network. In this regard it plays a practical role; it brings together the leaders of pro-life NGOs, providing (at least some of them) with the prospect of a lucrative professional career. Even a brief overview of the impressive staff catalogue on the website turns up the major players of the GCR network, e.g., Gregor Puppink (ECLJ), Stefano Gennarini (C-Fam), András Láncki (Center for European Renewal, Netherlands), William L. Saunders (Americans United for

Life), Stephen Nikola Bartulica (Center for the Renewal of Culture, Croatia)¹⁵ and Angela Gandra¹⁶ (Ives Gandra Institute of Law, Philosophy and Economy, Brazil).

Collegium Intermarium indicates that the potential cooperation between OI and the Polish government is not limited to the pro-life agenda. “Intermarium” relates directly to the concept of Polish foreign policy. In 2016 President Andrzej Duda announced the “Three Seas Initiative”—a new project aimed at improving the potential of Central European countries in the areas of infrastructure and the economy and thereby strengthening their position within the EU.¹⁷ The school authorities removed any doubts: “It’s not a coincidence that the name of the Collegium indicates our intention to support the Intermarium nations. With this goal in mind, Collegium Intermarium has taken upon itself the role of a leader in Poland, in the Intermarium region and in the international arena . . . The mission of the Collegium corresponds to the idea of regional cooperation, especially of the 12 member states of the EU which since 2016 have been participating in the Three Seas Initiative” (*Misja i wartości*).

OI’s embracing of the Intermarium shows how a faith-based actor, acting as a political lobbyist, adapts to the current political agenda. It is not, however, a simple situation of the government instrumentalising NGOs towards its own political ends. The “Three Seas Initiative” has been welcomed with enthusiasm by right wing groups, including those connected to the Piotr Skarga Foundation.¹⁸ It cannot be ruled out that this particular group inspired the presidential administration to pick up this idea in the first place. When it comes to the question of “Who influences whom?” (or “Who uses whom?”), the case of OI’s relationship with the current government could be described as one where a successful lobbyist has finally gained the ear of politicians who share their ideas. The cooperation is mutually beneficial and both parties engage in it with their own goals in mind. It seems, however, that the lobbyist, considering its relatively weak position vis-a-vis the ruling party, has turned out to be very skilful at playing a weak hand.

7. OI’s Entanglement in Politics

Without attempting to provide a detailed and thorough analysis of OI’s relations to politics, it is worth reflecting on this issue and focusing on the international activity of this faith-based actor which presents itself as an independent, non-political institution. Although OI has been operating since 2013, it became visible in politics two years later when Law and Justice (PiS) came to power. The ruling party was determined to replace the elite established as a result of the “rotten compromise” reached in 1989 at the round table talks between a part of the opposition and the Communists. One of PiS’s goals was to rebalance the dominance of the leftists among NGOs and to strengthen right-wing, conservative actors (Marczewski 2018; Bill 2020). OI seized this opportunity and turned into an efficient political lobbyist (Marczewski 2018) which provides the government with legal expertise and can mobilise social support. Its access to politics is also built on contacts with particular politicians, who, for different reasons, support OI’s projects—among them Piotr Gliński (Minister of Culture and National Heritage), Przemysław Czarnek (Minister of Education and Science) and Zbigniew Ziobro (Minister of Justice). Finally, in recent years people connected to OI have attained prominent positions within the state administration (Mierzyńska 2020). To give an example, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (important for OI’s international activity) the former president of OI, Aleksander Stępkowski, served as deputy minister in 2015–2016 (he is now a Supreme Court judge). Currently, the most visible person is Paweł Jabłoński, who previously worked as an OI expert and is now deputy minister for economic cooperation at the MFA.

It is important to stress that the conservative profile of PiS was not enough to guarantee smooth cooperation with OI. Indeed, getting access to the ruling party was achieved as a result of OI’s skilful lobbying.¹⁹ The gradual rapprochement can be observed well in the area of foreign policy. At first OI was critical about Polish diplomacy at the UN or Council of Europe. In 2016, OI described how Poland, instead of blocking, voted together with other EU members in favour of establishing an Independent Expert on sexual

orientation and gender identity ([Promocja strategicznych celów 2016](#)). “The posture of the Polish government is deeply disappointing,” OI commented, and reported that fortunately “the pressure exercised on the MFA made it distance itself” from the newly established institution ([Promocja strategicznych celów 2016](#); [Polska wśród państw 2016](#)). In 2017 OI condemned Polish diplomats for accepting the draft of the annual document prepared at the CSW UN and sadly concluded that “Polish politics is still not capable of civilisational independence and being consistent in protecting family rights from the radicalism of modern feminist ideology” ([Forsowane przez UE 2017](#)).

The last three years, however, have brought a noticeable change. At the UN, as Konrad Szczygieł observed, “Poland allying with Brazil, Hungary and the USA, has successfully fought gender, abortion and sex education at the UN forum. In November 2019, at the UN summit in Nairobi, the group championed a successful effort to remove the statement ‘reproductive and sexual health and rights’ from the UN position, because ‘it could be used to actively promote such practices as abortion’. Since December 2018, these four countries have also taken part in the “Partnership for Families”, an alliance whose ‘goal is to promote the family and pro-family policy in the international arena’” ([Szczygieł 2021](#)).

The extent to which things have changed in the Polish foreign affairs agenda is well illustrated by the Istanbul Convention. In 2014 OI published a report which concluded that this international act contradicted the Polish Constitution and promoted gender ideology ([Europejscy eksperci 2018](#)). Nevertheless, the government ratified the document in 2015. However, in July 2020, Minister of Justice Zbigniew Ziobro filed an application with the Ministry of Family and Social Policy to initiate the procedure for Poland to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention ([Lebel et al. 2021](#)). At the same time Paweł Jabłoński from the MFA (and a former OI expert) started to build a regional coalition of support which includes Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic.²⁰ Partner NGOs connected to OI played an active part in these countries’ campaigns against the Convention ([Lebel et al. 2021](#)), which shows that OI’s regional network has become operative and can be mobilised to support the actions of the Polish government. Furthermore, OI helped to prepare an alternative international agreement—the Convention on the Rights of the Family—presented at the European Parliament in July 2018 ([Konieczna realna walka 2021](#)).

An analysis of OI’s actions shows that the domestic order is its priority but that this requires taking steps in the international arena. For this reason, it has gone global in order to defend its primary interests at home. The Istanbul Convention confirms that OI has successfully translated its access to state institutions into influence ([Risse 2002](#), p. 268). It has proven capable of influencing the agenda of the Polish government and the actions of Polish diplomacy. However, the reverse phenomenon is also observed. The success of the pro-life agenda connected to PiS has led to OI having a stake in keeping this particular party in power. In recent years, OI has engaged in activity in the international arena in support of the Polish government. In 2016, in reaction to the international criticism of the systemic reforms undertaken by PiS, OI prepared a report about the state of democracy and human rights in Poland which was “a response to inaccurate and fragmentary information about the situation in our country” and was in favour of PiS. It was presented at the Institute of World Politics (Washington), the US Helsinki Commission and “shown to American congressmen and senators” ([Eksperci OI zaprezentowali w USA 2016](#)). It should be noted that the report was peer-reviewed by Professor Stephen Baskerville, who in 2020 became a member of the academic staff of Collegium Intermarium.

OI has backed the government’s handling of the Constitutional Tribunal and condemned as “political” the European Parliament’s intention to use measures foreseen by Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union ([Mocno zideologizowana rezolucja 2017](#)). In reaction to the attempt of the European Commission to link funding with respect for rule of law, OI prepared a detailed legal analysis which argues that the EU institutions are not entitled to intervene in the judiciary system of member states. The analysis was sent to all MEPs ([Nieuprawnione działania 2020](#)). In 2020 OI became involved in fighting against “fake news” about “alleged LGBT-free zones” in Polish municipalities. The zones became

problematic for local and national government because they resulted in applications submitted by Polish entities for the EU subventions within the “Sister Cities” programme being rejected. OI sent an official document to the Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions Committee Parliamentary Assembly OSCE in which it denied the existence of the “LGBT-free zones” and argued that Polish law fully protects each of its citizens regardless of their sexual orientation (Fake news 2020). Finally, in the beginning of 2021, OI announced a new programme of “protecting the good name of Poland”. As the authorities of the institutions explained, it was “a response to the repeating of historical lies and charges formulated against Poland by leftist activists, politicians and foreign mass media which accuse our country of violating international law . . . ” (Ordo Iuris w obronie dobrego imienia 2021). While launching the initiative, OI threatened several lawsuits.

Clifford Bob wrote about the Christian Right international network using local actors to influence the domestic politics of their countries (Bob 2012, p. 11). The case study of OI shows that a reverse situation—in which a local NGO uses an international network to legitimate actions taken by the government—is also possible. This is a valuable observation which reveals the complex effects of the politicisation of religion in global and regional contexts.

8. Conclusions

The story of Ordo Iuris is one of success—a faith-based actor which has efficiently elevated its own normative agenda to the level of national diplomacy and developed its own international activity. It is true that this success owes much to the rise of PiS to power. Nevertheless, OI was determined and well prepared to make the most of this opportunity. The story of OI is also one of success for the GCR. Among numerous faith-based institutions operating in Poland, a country notorious for the politicisation of religion, OI represents a new type of actor inspired by the global network of CR. Its reluctance in referring openly to the Christian tradition and maintaining a consistent image of an institution of legal expertise distinguishes it from other faith-based Polish NGOs and reveals its affiliation with the legal advocacy organisations of the Christian Right. Learning from C-Fam or the European Centre for Law and Justice, OI has developed international activity; it is connected to the Global Christian Right advocacy network and shows the ambition of creating one of its own in Central Europe. It keeps up to date with the narrative and methods of the GCR. Most important is the counterhegemonic pro-life discourse which makes use of liberal ideas. This introduced a new dynamic, the confrontational effects of which democratic societies, including Poland’s, are still grappling with.

The conservative sympathies of the ruling party facilitated access to politics and OI has managed to turn this into actual influence. Its entanglement in politics has become possible to detect, however, in its own agenda. OI has become a lobbyist which, while seeking to influence the government, has gradually embraced political logic. OI presents a case where a faith-based actor, whose actions are inspired and centred around a set of norms, takes into account the national interest. The relevance of geopolitical thinking for OI can be observed in its approach towards Central Europe and Russia. The lines between the national and international have blurred. A pro-life agenda is associated with patriotism since protection of the family is inextricably connected to sovereignty. This effect of the politicisation of the agenda of the faith-based actors operating globally is visible also with other members of the GCR.

OI, inspired by the GCR, has crossed borders in order to counter the foreign leftist influence in Warsaw. According to this logic, so familiar to the Christian Right, you cannot sit and wait until they are at your doorstep. You have to take pre-emptive actions and face them in Brussels, New York and Geneva. Observing the impressive pace of its development, it is safe to say that Ordo Iuris will continue to play a visible role in the right-wing segment of Polish civil society, as well as the Central European conservative network.

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Notes

- 1 An amicus curiae brief refers to a situation where a subject (such as a professional person or an organisation) who is not a party to a particular litigation but who is permitted by the court to advise it with respect to some matter of law that directly affects the case in question.
- 2 In 2008 the Curia in Cracow officially denied it had any links to the organisation which founded OI, i.e., the Piotr Skarga Institute of Religious and Social Education Foundation ([Komunikat Kurii 2008](#)).
- 3 The authors of the report write that the fundraising model of the TFP “was inspired by American Republican politicians and activists linked to the American Leadership Institute, where TFP members were trained and also shared their experience giving lectures” ([Lebel et al. 2020](#)).
- 4 The ADF was an institutional patron at the 2012 conference held at the University of Warsaw that inaugurated the founding of OI ([Dauksza 2021](#)).
- 5 When she gave this comment she still had her maiden surname Walinowicz. After getting married in 2020, she took the surname of her husband Krzysztof Bosak—the leader of the right wing party Konfederacja and candidate for president in the 2020 election.
- 6 People who I interviewed talked about the besieged fortress syndrome characteristic of OI.
- 7 The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, better known as the Istanbul Convention, is a human rights treaty of the Council of Europe opposing violence against women and domestic violence and which was opened for signature on 11 May 2011 in Istanbul, Turkey. The convention aims at the prevention of violence, victim protection and to end the impunity of perpetrators.
- 8 Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality
- 9 There is conflicting information regarding whether this office is still operating. An insider suggested that OI has withdrawn from this project.
- 10 I used amici curiae to approach the Constitutional Tribunal of Romania which discussed the novelisation of the constitution about reaffirming the definition of marriage as a union of a man and a woman ([Rumunia coraz bliżej 2017](#)), and also in Georgia ([Nie mogli 2020](#)).
- 11 Those whom OI has filed a lawsuit against include: journalists Tomasz Piątek and Klementyna Suchanow, former minister of foreign affairs Radosław Sikorski, film director Agnieszka Holland, Polish MP Anna Maria Żukowska, Polish leftist politician Joanna Senyszyn, Polish MEP Robert Biedroń and MEP Guy Verhofstadt, the Secretary of the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights Neil Datta.
- 12 This school was not established directly by OI but by the Education to Values Foundation which was brought to life in 2020. The president of OI Jerzy Kwaśniewski and the vice president Tymoteusz Zych are both members of the foundation’s supervisory board but they have switched functions, i.e., Zych leads the foundation and Kwaśniewski is his deputy. Two other OI members—Karolina Kwaśniewska and Marcin Olszówka—are members of its board. Additionally, Tymoteusz Zych is rector of Collegium Intermarium and Jerzy Kwaśniewski is the head of its trustees board.
- 13 Polish organisations distance themselves from the WCF—“the Congress remains in the sphere of influence of Russian oligarchs linked to Putin since 2011, which might portray the Polish entities in a negative light” ([Dauksza 2021](#)).
- 14 The Russian name for tsarist autocracy.
- 15 Also a member of the nationalist movement *Domovinski pokret* (‘Movement for the fatherland’), which in 2020 won 13 seats in the Croatian parliament.
- 16 While Brazil’s Secretary of State for Family Affairs at the country’s Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights, Angela Gandra was guest of honour at the Defending Women’s Rights Conference organised by Ordo Iuris in November 2020. The situation roused some controversy because the Polish MFA was neither informed nor officially involved in organising a trip of Brazil’s Secretary of State ([Szczygieł 2021](#)).
- 17 The initiative was joined by Austria, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia ([Legucka 2020](#)).
- 18 The webpage owned by the Piotr Skarga Foundation—Polonia Christiana PCh24 (<https://pch24.pl/>)—has published extensively and mostly favourably about the Three Seas Initiative.

- 19 Another factor which helped OI was the factional rivalry within the ruling elite, especially between the camp of Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and that of Minister of Justice Zbigniew Ziobro. The latter supported OI's action against the Istanbul Convention—a move aimed at weakening the prime minister.
- 20 The international team of investigative journalists Vsquare reported: “The Polish ministry of justice sends a letter to the governments of several countries in the region with a proposal for a new international convention aimed at defending the rights of the family, the content of which has been disclosed by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN). The Polish ministry of justice has officially argued that the proposals (put forward by Ordo Iuris and the ministry) are unrelated to one another. The findings of BIRN show that Slovenia unequivocally rejected the proposal by the Polish ministry of justice. We asked the other governments in the region about their answers to the letter sent by the Polish ministry. As it turns out, at the end of September, Slovakia also rejected the proposal. ‘Regarding the content of your proposed future convention, we believe that individual rights are sufficiently protected by Slovak law and existing international conventions, and therefore we do not see the need to prepare a new international instrument in this area,’ the Slovak Ministry of Justice replied to the letter” (Lebel et al. 2021).

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