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## THE ANTI-GENDER MOVEMENT AND ITS CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPEAN MAIN ACTORS

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This paper focuses on the anti-gender movement in Central and Eastern Europe, as a part of the global phenomenon. Based on both the subject literature and the author's own research, it points out its anti-democratic character and its role in de-democratizing change in the region. Although the main features and strategies of the movement are common on the global or European levels, its developments in the CEE region are unique: the state policies incorporate the political agenda of the anti-gender movement or even the actors of the anti-gender movement effectively affect the state policies. As the main actors apply the strategy of staying behind the curtain and steering from the backseat, the main research problem lies in revealing their role, which is why the most successful analyses result from combining local research with the international exchange of findings and comparative analysis. The anti-gender movement in the CEE region has succeeded in two main fields: anti-abortion and anti-LGBT+ policies, and these two fields are taken into account in the paper, while the others are only mentioned. State homophobia is associated with Putin's Russia, especially after February 24, 2022, it is also typical for several countries of the CE region, including European Union member states. Strict anti-abortion law has been developed in Poland, which is why author's research focuses on this aspect. The case study analysis of *Ordo Iuris*, the Polish flagship of the local anti-gender movement, offers a significant example of a local level of the anti-gender network.

**Keywords**

anti-gender movement, ultra-right, new authoritarianism, de-democratisation

**Introduction**

The aim of this paper is to present the anti-gender phenomenon viewed from the perspective of Central and Eastern Europe. Although all writers agree that the phenomenon plays a crucial role in contemporary political tensions, they often use alternative theoretical approaches. Anti-gender, anti-feminist, anti-abortion, and the anti-LGBT turn in both public discourses and public policies are analyzed from the perspective of various theoretical approaches, such as: the post-secular turn, the anti-feminist backlash, increasing

neoconservatism, the increasing role of neoliberalism, far right movements, and, finally, the impact of the anti-gender movement.

All of these approaches are complementary, not contradictory; the variety of classifications offered by various researchers result from the variety of fields and theoretical approaches they represent. In fact, each of them offers convincing explanations of the anti-feminist, anti-abortion, or anti-LGBT agendas. However, the approach focusing on the anti-gender movement seems the most promising one. The anti-gender movement approach applies the social movement perspective, which seems appropriate to the huge impact onto the social and political processes in the region.

Although anti-gender movements across the globe share the same worldwide agenda, Central and Eastern Europe seems to provide the best conditions for their development. One of the reasons may be the lack of democratic standards and the weak consolidation of democratization, or even the processes of de-democratization. The second factor might be the role of hidden actors, like the Catholic Church, Putin's Russia, or the international anti-gender movement. Or all of these factors combined, which is quite probable in the view of existing research data.

Research into this phenomenon is very difficult, as the basic anti-gender communication strategy hides its real agenda behind a facade of democratic, inclusive, and anti-discriminatory discourses prepared according to the best public relations methods.

That is why my main objective is to present the hidden actors, and to reveal the relations between them, on the basis of both subject literature and my own research; my research questions concern their identity, connections, and strategies, especially those concerning communication.

The text is not a review of previously published research findings, but rather an analysis of the most important results of various authors and research teams. It brings together the most significant results of the research that has been conducted by other authors, *i.e.*, the subject literature summary, plus chosen cases from my own research, that have not been published in English, to fill the gaps and to serve as an illustration of the topics not covered by other researchers. I also use my own research experience – including studies of anti-feminist, anti-LGBT, anti-contraception, and anti-abortion political actors in Poland, from the beginning of this millennium (Desperak 2003; Desperak 2011, Desperak 2019) – to draw the conclusions.

As the main anti-gender movement communication strategy is secrecy, manipulation, and hiding behind faked images, and even the most accurate research brings the results representing only the tip of the iceberg, with the huge bulk of data still hidden, the most promising research method is to reveal hidden facts, concerning both the identities of its actors and their activities. This research strategy proved successful for Neil Datta (2018; 2019a, 2019b), Klementyna Suchanow (2020), Agnieszka Graff with Elżbieta Korolczuk (2022), and others. That is why I decided to apply secondary data analysis and studied published data concerning activities of actors in the field covered by research; I also used materials published by the actors themselves. In this very field it is difficult to differentiate between data included in academic papers and those published as mass media content, as many authors – such as Neil Datta, Elżbieta Korolczuk, Klementyna Suchanow or Anna Mierzyńska – publish in both. Although the research is based on published data, press releases, and website content, the research is not content analysis or discourse analysis. Taking into account the media content manipulation strategy, applied by anti-gender or-

ganizations, this content is to be treated critically, with the use of both propaganda research tools and journalists' fact-checking (Pratkanis, Aronson 2001; Mierzyńska 2022).

## The anti-gender movement and anti-genderism

Anti-gender mobilization has been observed all over Europe since the beginning of this millennium (Graff, Korolczuk 2022, 15). The term “anti-gender movement” has been appearing since the mid-2000s, after the invention of so-called “gender ideology” (Kuhar, Paternotte, 2017a, 12; Graff, Korolczuk 2022, 41). Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, editors of comparative study *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe*, defined the anti-gender movement as “a complex constellation of global actors” built by various national organizations (2017b: 271).

Researchers of this new phenomenon warn of its broader, anti-democratic character. Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk, in their book *Anti-gender Politics in the Populist Moment*, conceptualize anti-gender mobilizations as a part of a broader conflict, “where what is truly at stake is the future of democracy” (Graff, Korolczuk 2022, 3). Also, Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte warn against a threat not only to the direct targets of anti-gender struggles, but also to democracy (Kuhar, Paternotte 2017b, 256). Moreover, Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk locate their analysis of the anti-gender movement within the framework of populism, as the populist turn has been operating since the beginning of this millennium (Chiantera-Stutte, Pető 2003). Observations of the movement's impact on Central and Eastern Europe lead to the conclusion that the process of de-democratisation is advancing there, especially when we take into account the gender dimension of political transformations. That is why a thorough analysis of anti-gender movement and its political impact, especially in the former East bloc, is necessary<sup>1</sup>. Today, after the Russian attack on Ukraine, the data revealing the role of Putin's Russia in the movement makes the topic much more alarming (Snyder 2018; Suchanow 2020).

Anti-gender movement focuses mainly on opposing gender equality, reproductive rights, sex education, the Istanbul convention, and LGBT+ rights. Moreover, in some countries, such as Russia (Moss 2017), or Poland (Graff and Korolczuk 2017), it is the state that takes over the anti-gender movement and combats “gender ideology” (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017, 254); thus, the anti-gender movement succeeds and is transformed into a powerful political actor.

The main actors and allies of the anti-gender movement often consist of family associations, anti-abortion groups, religious conservatives, Catholic dignitaries, nationalists and populists, far right groups, and others. The main actors are either already-existing groups (sometimes well-established), newly established groups, or allies (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017b, 259). This mixture of different actors makes research diagnosis a very difficult task. Another problem is that other key actors of the movement try to remain hidden.

1 Local particularity means also, that the number of international publications in English, concerning this region, is still insufficient, and the local research results are announced in local languages. The first international publication concerning the anti-gender movement in our region (Гендер і антигендер — Гендерний журнал «Я», 4(34)) I met was published in English, Russian, and Ukrainian. My own communication concerning the Belarusian no-abortion zone in Lohoyk was based on information I received from a Belarusian researcher, who planned to announce it in English, but that never happened. Another of my researches needed multilingual translations between Hungarian, Polish, and English, and here, on the very Eastern border of Europe, exchange of research results is still infrequent.

Moreover, in several countries anti-gender actors overlap with those promoting right-wing populist politics (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017a, 14), and adopt the toolkit of right-wing populist rhetoric, identified by Ruth Wodak (2015, 60) as: victim-perpetrator reversal, scapegoating, and the construction of conspiracy theories. Also, right wing “politics of fear” and the “arrogance of ignorance” are useful terms in anti-gender discourse (Wodak 2015, 4). Furthermore, some of these actors are – as Kuhar and Paternotte point out – just empty shells. They present a façade which gives the impression of being an actual organization and simulate the existence and extensive network of one. Sometimes the same actors assume different positions in different organizations: one person can be the president of one organization and a board member of another, and so on. It is also striking that women sometimes play a distinctive role in these organizations as their leaders (Kuhar and Paternotte 2018b, 261), which is another PR strategy of this movement, appealing to the social role of women as mothers. This strategy helps to conceal the real actors behind the scenes, obstructing the efforts of public opinion, and even researchers, to identify them. As Weronika Grzebalska, Eszter Kováts and Andrea Petó explain, the term ‘gender’ has become a symbolic glue, binding together disparate actors and agendas (Grzebalska, Kováts, and Petó 2017; Kovacs, Pöim 2015).

Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk view the movement as an emanation of the ideology of anti-genderism, based on a set of convictions about the nature of man, “natural law”, and human dignity, that is consistent with Christian dogma, pointing out the theological roots of it (Graff, Korolczuk 2022, 19). The religious dimension of the anti-gender movement is often associated with fundamentalism, ranging from American Christian fundamentalism (Castells 2010,23), Vatican inspired anti-genderism (Butler 2000), Graff, Korolczuk 2022, 5) or traditionally rooted parareligious organizations, such as the Brazilian Tradição, Família, Propriedade (Suchanow 2018). However, anti-genderism often viewed mainly as a religious trend, is also described as a transnational countermovement to feminism, and a reaction to the undemocratic ways in which gender equality measures were introduced in the first place in Eastern European states. Anti-genderism is also viewed as “anti-feminism”, as an attack on gender studies and public education, or as an effort to oppose marriage equality and LGBT+ rights (Graff, Korolczuk 2022, 19).

As the anti-gender agenda varies in different national contexts, it is difficult to differentiate its main actors from their local allies, found in ultraconservative groups and right-wing populist parties (Kováts and Pöim 2015). In former socialist countries, according to Graff and Korolczuk, “anti-genderism takes on a distinctly nationalist form: resistance to Western ideologies of gender equality is presented as a mark of national sovereignty and a chance to regain a rightful place in the moral geography of Europe” (Graff, Korolczuk 2022, 27). The same authors also claim that some elements of anti-gender discourse, such as antisemitism or open homophobia, appear from time to time in specific locations but are neither constant nor present everywhere. However, even if anti-abortion mobilization also seems to be more local phenomenon, homophobia becomes a common feature of the anti-gender movement agenda in Central and Eastern European states, which is why those two components are to be analysed later below.

Although many researchers stick to the term “anti-gender” phenomena, some prefer talking about “anti-genderism”. For Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte they are rather synonymous (Kuhar, Paternotte 2018a, 2), whereas Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korol-

czuk, also addressing “anti-gender” phenomena in the title of their book, prefer using the term “anti-genderism” while dealing with ideology resembling anti-feminism:

First, anti-genderism is an ideology, a worldview, a body of knowledge whose proponents aspire to legitimacy in academia and transnational institutions. The set of ideas we call anti-genderism is marked by internal coherence and remarkable flexibility, and it is crucial that we acknowledge these two features. Certain elements remain constant: the central claim that “gender” is about collapsing natural differences; the notion that it is a danger to children, family, and reproduction; insistence that it is an imposition of global elites. This common core enables cooperation between ultraconservative groups and right-wing populist parties lending some ideological coherence to otherwise disparate political endeavors (Kováts and Pöim 2015; Dietze and Roth 2020a). However, anti-genderism is also remarkably malleable and varied. (Graff, Korolczuk 2022, 20).

### Key strategies of the anti-gender movement

Comparative research shows both differences between certain local activities of anti-gender movement actors, and similarities, especially when comparing strategies used to succeed.

The first similarity was revealed by **language** and **discourse** analysis of anti-gender movement campaigns. In her analysis of the Polish transformation viewed through gender lenses Agnieszka Graff noted that the first triumph of the anti-abortion branch of the movement was achieved thanks to the battle on language (Graff 2001, 121). Also, a public communication strategy seems to be a powerful weapon of an anti-gender crusade. Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk observe that the manifesto of Agenda Europe recommends the “colonization of human rights” – that is, the reframing of ultraconservative religious positions on sex and reproduction to sound like human rights language (Graff, Korolczuk 2022, 51). Another effective tool is using pro-family language or human rights terminology to exclude everyone and everything not fitting to the specific meaning of those terms. Elżbieta Korolczuk, who visited the World Congress of Families, highlights their strategy of using the language of positive self-presentation which supports families and family values, rather than rhetoric against anything. The main keywords during the Congress were: family, marriage, and children. Even when the communication in fact leads to the conclusion that these groups have to be protected or even saved from: contraception, abortion, same sex marriages, and equality education in schools where the only family is a traditional one, this propaganda trick seems to be effective (Korolczuk 2019).

Another successful communication strategy is based on malinformation, misinformation and **disinformation**. Anti-gender activists spread false information suggesting that gay men are disproportionately more prone to paedophilia, and that sex education in schools is, in fact, just a smokescreen for the “sexualization” of children, which will make them easy prey for sexual predators. Simultaneously, it has been suggested, that “LGBT+ ideology” targets religion and endangers the Polish nation (Korolczuk 2020a, 167).

The political success of anti-gender movement results not only from the number of its actors, and transnational collaboration in the globalising world, but its network structure, according to Manuel Castells, a fundamental feature of new political movements (Castells 1997, 210), challenging the traditional structure of a state. It is supported by hiding the real structure behind a curtain, called by Neil Datta (after Gizele Zanotto) the “**strategy of a chameleon**” meaning the juggling of various organizational forms, names, and images

(Datta 2019, 81; Zanotto 2007), or posing as “wolves in sheep’s clothing” according to the term used by Elżbieta Korolczuk (2020). Public actors of anti-gender movement not only form their agenda in democratic human rights terminology, but also organize themselves as non-governmental organizations, pillars of civic society.

A Belarussian example shows how effective such a strategy is. The first non-abortion zone in Belarus, declared in the city of Lahoysk in 2013, resulted from an “experiment” conducted there by a – nominally – non-governmental organization, Matulya<sup>2</sup>, specializing in promoting “natural methods of family planning” and “informing about threats of abortion and contraception”. Thanks to an agreement between the Ministry of Health and the Belarusian Orthodox Church under the “Right to Life” programme, Matulya conducted a training programme in the hospital in Lahoysk that resulted in the decision of its staff to not perform abortions in this very hospital (Desperak. 2017).

However, applying an NGO façade, the anti-gender organisations are as least transparent as possible. The studies of Klementyna Suchanow show how difficult is to track the roles of various actors in various organizations (Suchanow 2020). My own research on the local anti-abortion movement revealed that finding real author, or founder, of an anti-abortion billboard campaign is virtually impossible (Desperak 2022). The financial aspect of anti-gender activity is especially non-transparent, but thanks to investigative journalism the most telling evidence of secret networks of collaboration may be revealed, as in the case American organizations financial support for the Russian anti-gender movement and homophobic policy. Non-material support is also offered, such as so called ‘experts’, imported from the USA, like Paul Cameron or Mark Regnerus (Gessen, 271–2, Frank 2013, Morska 2016), or from Western Europe, like Gabriele Kuby (Graff, Korolczuk 2022, 17.) Imported know-how also appears in public campaigns, like American Gender Awareness Project projects in billboard street campaigns, started in 2005 (Desperak 2022).

Another similarity observed, when one compares implementation of anti-democratic laws in various states, is using different **political tools** to achieve the desired results. The Polish ban on abortion was accomplished by the passing of the anti-abortion law by Parliament, and supported by decisions of Constitutional courts, finding that abortion on the grounds of the previously accepted exceptions is unconstitutional. In Belarus, the same effect, even if limited to one town or region of Lahoysk, was achieved thanks to the decision of doctors working in the one and only hospital performing abortions. The first anti-LGBT+ policies in Poland were not implemented in any official way, but only announced in a mass media interview, in Lithuania – through passing the homophobic law by parliament, in Russia, at first, by the decisions of local authorities of a few cities (Ryazan, Arkhangelsk Kostroma, and St Petersburg), followed on the federal level, and finally passed by Duma. Polish so called “zones without LGBT ideology” were established locally, by townships and voivodeships.

## The Transnational network

The anti-gender network works on global, European, and local levels, and the actors of each level build complex, difficult to research into, but not invisible, networks. The most powerful and visible actors of the anti-gender movement on the transnational level are World Congress of Families, Tradition, Family and Property, and Agenda Europe.

2 in Belarussian „mommy”

**The World Congress of Families (WCF)** was formed in 1997, originated from the American Christian Right, and has built a web of influence in different countries, including Russia, providing a networking focus for global anti-LGBT+ forces, as well as working as a political power broker and an anti-LGBT+ group in its own right. Its legacy includes the mainstreaming of the so-called “natural family” doctrine, one that has been used to curtail LGBT+ and reproductive rights across the world. It is a flagship project of the International Organization for the Family (IOF), the Southern Poverty Law Center lists the IOF as a hate group. (Graff, Korolczuk 2022, 47; Barthélemy, 2018). The WCF meets regularly in countries where the anti-choice, anti-gender, or anti-LGBT+ organizations are operating. In 2017, for example, it was hosted by the Hungarian government, and its prime minister Victor Orban took part in it. In 2019 the Congress was held in Verona, Italy, and was co-organized by its authorities and part of the Italian government. Matteo Salvini, then Italian deputy prime minister and home secretary of the political party, the Northern League [Lega Nord] was enthusiastically greeted by its participants. The Congress also visited Central and East European capital cities, such as Warsaw, Moscow, and Chisinau. Its recent meeting was held in 2022, in Mexico City, where the Polish organization, *Ordo Iuris*, was awarded “for its activities in the area of family support” (The *Ordo Iuris* Institute Awarded at the World Congress of Families in Mexico, 2022).

**Tradition, Family, and Property (TFP)**, although today active mainly at the European level, derives from the Brazilian Tradição, Família e Propriedade organization. According to Neil Datta, it is becoming prevalent across Europe thanks to 100–150 organizations and individuals, using the strategy of a chameleon, namely in each country fabricating a different image (Datta 2019b, 2020). His analysis of this transnational, ultra-conservative, Catholic-inspired influence network of “Modern-day Crusaders” describes its development, and analyses how three chosen events affecting human rights in sexuality and reproduction (a proposed ban on abortion in Poland, blocking support for She Decides in Croatia, and halting a civil union law in Estonia) were in fact spearheaded by organizations which appear to be the national tentacles of this network (Datta 2019a, 3).

**Agenda Europe** is one of TFP’s allies and, according to Neil Datta, European gravitational centre of the global anti-SRR (Sexual and Reproductive Rights) community represented within the World Congress of Families (Datta 2018, 34). Its main goal is “restoring the natural order” through rolling back not just advances in equal marriage or women’s right to choose, but also limiting access to assisted reproduction, comprehensive sexuality education, protection from gender-based violence, contraception, and even divorce (Datta 2019a, 2).

Another level of the network is built on the **national** scale, where smaller and less visible local actors aim to implement Agenda Europe, WCF and TFP strategies.

## Local level

*Ordo Iuris*, a Polish organization with several branches in other countries of Central and East European region, might be a very telling example of such a local actor. This example has been chosen because of the entanglement of two crucial topics of the anti-gender network in Central and East Europe: anti-abortion and anti-LGBT+ policy, implemented in Poland, and the impact of the anti-gender movement on state policy. So far, only in Poland, demands of the anti-abortion movement were transformed into an ultraradical

anti-abortion bill, in the very beginning of post-communist transition, as one of the most significant redefinitions of the legal and symbolic order. Poland also plays a crucial role in reconstructing – together with other Central and East European states – a new Iron Curtain, separating them from Western Europe through an anti-LGBT+ coalition.

The Polish example, however, cannot be presented without the broader context of the **Central and East European region**, formed by former Eastern bloc states. It is here where anti-genderism not only is shaped into open officially accepted homophobia, but where homophobic policies were legalized and became part of the official state political order. The concept of **illiberal democracy** (Zakaria 2005), **populist authoritarianism** (Sadurski 2019) or **neo-authoritarianism** (Gdula 2018) are often used in diagnoses of the direction of transition in this region. Some countries of the region occupy low positions in various classifications ranking political systems or are classified as non democratic or as authoritarian regimes. Others, like Poland, recently lost their position, being classified as less democratic or more non-democratic than before, in the initial period of post-communist transition. As personal social freedoms, including gender equality, choice of marriage partners, and size of family, are included in contemporary definitions of democracy, (the Freedom House: <https://freedomhouse.org/>), anti-egalitarian gender and sexuality policies must be interpreted as an anti-democratic or non-democratic direction of political transition. That is why the concept of **de-democratisation**, described by Charles Tilly (2007), seems to be more accurate in this case. An alternative approach of **imitation democracy** (Furman 2022) should be also taken into account. Other authors tend to classify the anti-egalitarian, anti-gender, homo- and transphobic turn as **fascist** in its nature (Snyder 2018; Stanley 2018, 139). The more their analysis focuses on Russia, the more severe **anti-democratic** diagnosis becomes. As Russian influence on the anti-gender movement, especially in Central and East European regions, has been revealed by several researchers, its threat for democracy is really severe. The research of Klementyna Suchanow (2020) revealing the connections between Putin's Russia and Polish political actors, both hidden and official, is imposing.

As the anti-gender movement acts through diffusion of specific modes of actors across Europe (Kuhar, Paternotte 2018a, 2) its analysis should show all possible varieties of them. As huge research on Poland is still not available in English, I decided to use Poland as an illustration, and Ordo Iuris studies by various actors as a case study –. Ordo Iuris does not represent all anti-gender organizations as *pars pro toto*, but so far Klementyna Suchanow's huge scale research results (still not available in English) have huge significance, not only in Poland. Although it is impossible to estimate the real scale and impact of its international network of organizations, the data concerning its connections with Russia are especially alarming today, after its attack on Ukraine. I also decided to include my own microscale findings concerning local examples revealing hidden actors in both Hungary and Belarus. This way, starting from my own experience of locally rooted research, I try to avoid the trap of methodological nationalism, mentioned by Kuhar and Paternotte (2018a, 4)

In the beginning the research on the main actors of the anti-egalitarian turn in Central and East Europe focused on the local level – researchers in various countries tried to find out who's behind it, usually in local languages. Only when the academic networks enabled transnational exchange of research data, their analyses could include international, and even global, actors. In Poland only Klementyna Suchanow's research, first published in



2018 (Suchanow 2018) revealed international connections of *Ordo Iuris*, and only after her revealing them did *Ordo Iuris* decide to make them public.

## Gender and reproductive issues

If the findings of researchers focusing on the gendered dimension of transition were listened to by political science, the anti-democratic threat would be noticed much earlier. First the anti-abortion bill was passed in Poland in 1993, but the anti-abortion policy turn was visible in all of the transforming region of the former Eastern bloc. Also, in 1993 Barbara Einhorn published *Cinderella Goes to Market*, where she described the new, gendered direction of political transformation of four Central East European countries: Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the former GDR part of the reuniting Germany. Einhorn observed two parallel processes: relegating women to the private sphere in the name of the national interest and displacing them from participation in the labour force by planting them squarely back in the family, their “primary sphere of responsibility” (Einhorn 1993, 258). Both processes overlapped, reconceptualizing the definition of women’s roles.

The anti-choice or anti-abortion part of the anti-gender movement was its first component observed in transforming Poland, and it is also its first success, when the Polish Parliament passed its first bill, radically limiting access to abortion. The bill, very significantly was called the Law on Family Planning, Human Embryo Protection, and Conditions of Permissibility of Abortion, passed in January 1993, allowed abortion only in cases of three exceptions when abortion was still legal: in cases of rape, when the woman’s life was in jeopardy, or if the foetus was irreparably damaged. The Polish anti-choice movement did not stop its activity after implementing this strict legislation. Its next objectives were, however, the further restriction of abortion, combating (nearly non-existent) sex education, and limiting access to emergency contraception and in vitro fertilization. Several projects of subsequent bills were either limiting the number of exceptions or making abortion absolutely illegal. They were submitted to the Parliament as a citizen’s initiative, another tool of civic society and liberal democracy used by anti-democratic players. Klementyna Suchanow writes that main actor in the draft bill “Stop abortion” from 2016 was *Ordo Iuris*, and “Jeden z Nas”, the Polish branch of “One of Us” acted as a key actor in a similar draft bill from 2018. Although those projects were not passed by Parliament, the second, making abortion because of serious foetal damage illegal, was implemented as a result of the decision of the Constitutional Court (in October 2020), that abortion in cases when the foetus has serious and irreversible birth defects is unconstitutional. This judgment caused huge protests across the country, the biggest public protests since the Solidarity times, involving at least 8% of population (CBOS 2020). Nevertheless, another citizen’s bill project to ban abortion completely was submitted in 2021. This process shows that the real objective of the anti-choice campaigners might be a total ban of abortion together with the curtailment of other reproductive rights, including those reducing the risk of unwanted pregnancy or support for conception and pregnancy.

For several years Poland seemed to be an isolated island of restrictive abortion law. However, the example of neighbouring Lithuania, and Slovakia, with their bill proposals following in the footsteps of Poland, showed that the Polish case might be used by the transnational anti-choice movement. Examples from Belarus and Russia, with periods of time and hospitals where no abortions appear, proved that – step by step – the ban or strict

limitations on abortion might be implemented anywhere. The Belarusian and Russian cases are very instructive and eye-opening (Desperak 2017, Suchanow 2020). Limitations of access to abortion, implemented in the USA in 2022, prove that the anti-choice branch of the anti-gender movement can succeed not only in Central East European region.

### **The anti-LGBT+ movement and state homophobia**

The anti-gender movement attracts both anti-choice and anti-LGBT+ campaigners. Although, according to Elzbieta Korolczuk, the early activities of the anti-gender movement were directed against sex education, the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, and attempts to introduce new restrictions on access to abortion since the spring of 2019:

the main enemy of ultraconservative forces has been LGBT people, and the term ‘LGBT ideology’ has, to some extent, replaced the phrase ‘gender ideology’, which has been used to suggest that the proponents of gender equality and sexual equality are wolves in sheep’s clothing: dangerous ideologues aiming to dismantle the ‘traditional’ family, the nation and, ultimately, ‘Christian civilisation’. The main charges against the LGBT community include accusations of paedophilia, ‘Christianophobia’ and the desire to destroy the Catholic Church, which is portrayed as the healthy core of the Polish nation (Korolczuk 2020a, 166).

Although Polish anti-abortion policy is still the only exception among its neighbours, its new anti-LGBT+ policy directs it toward the footsteps of Russia. According to Kevin Moss, official homophobia is the other side of the coin of the anti-gender movement in this country (Moss 2018). Polish anti-LGBT+ campaigns resulted in resolutions by tens of municipalities declaring themselves to be “free from LGBT+ ideology,” so far covering 30% of country (Atlas Nienawiści 2021). Homophobic declarations of local authorities are not without reason compared to Russian state homophobia, as the method of introduction is similar. The (in)famous Russian law “for the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating a Denial of Traditional Family Values”, is also known as the “anti-gay propaganda law”. This regulation applies strategies described by Wodak (2015) as victim-perpetrator reversal, presenting LGBT+ people as a threat, and a popular anti-gender movement trick of manipulation – supposedly – risks to children. In fact, this not only forbids presenting LGBT+ issues in an educational context, but also results in prosecution for publishing links to Guardian articles on the same-sex marriage referendum in Ireland or for displaying rainbow flags (Suchanow 2020, 310). After Russia, several post-Soviet countries have implemented similar laws: Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Latvia, Moldova, and Ukraine (IGLYO 2018). Moreover, in 2022, Putin signed a new law expanding Russia’s restrictions on the promotion of what it calls “LGBT propaganda”, effectively outlawing any public expression of LGBT behaviour or lifestyle in Russia. (Jones 2022).

In Russia, state homophobia is not limited to legal acts discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation. Timothy Snyder in his *Road to Unfreedom* points out that an anti-LGBT+ attitude is a key component for Russian anti-democratic movements. In 2011, when Russians protested against faked elections, their leaders associated the protestors with homosexuality. In late 2013, confronted with the Maidan in Ukraine, the men of the Kremlin made the same move. Aleksandr Zaldostanov, the leader of nationalist Night Wolves, while celebrating the annexation of the Crimea declared his resistance against “global Satanism, the increasing barbarism of Western Europe, consumerism, negating

any spirituality, demolishing traditional values, all that homosexual talk, this American democracy.” Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov began to claim that the Russian government had to take a stand against homosexuality to defend the innocence of Russian society (Snyder 2018, 179). These are not randomly chosen cases of homophobic declarations – they result from the official state program addressing sexuality as a key factor.

However, the first country that implemented such a law, following a parliamentary vote in 2009, was Lithuania, a European Union member country. Moreover, the idea probably came from Poland, where a similar solution emerged in 2006 on an informal basis, through a declaration during an interview in the media by an official of the Ministry of Education, when the ministry was led by Roman Giertych, a politician from the Polish Families League, and a previous founder and leader of the virtually neo-fascist nationalist All-Polish Youth organization (*Młodzież Wszechpolska*) (Kula 2011, 109). A decade later, in 2018, still without an official law making the teaching of LGBT+ issues illegal, Polish schools which organized “Rainbow Fridays” devoted to LGBT+ rights faced violence and intimidation. “Rainbow Fridays” were condemned by both school superintendents and the All-Polish Youth movement; and a new actor, *Ordo Iuris*, sent a request for public information of the list of schools organizing such actions.

Attack on LGBT+ community rights has been not limited to gay, lesbian, or bisexual people, as in the beginning of open anti-gay propaganda preparing to implementation of homophobic legislation. Transphobia, however, fuelled the beginning of the anti-gender campaign in Poland, starting with intense moral panic around some educational programs in kindergartens, tagged as “promoting gender ideology”. As Maciej Duda noted, the programs of the Stop Gender Ideology parliamentary group promoted “changing sex” (Duda 2016, 16).

### Poland: *Ordo Iuris*

Case study analysis of the main Polish representative of the anti-gender movement is possible thanks to recent discoveries of Klementyna Suchanow, Elżbieta Korolczuk, Anna Mierzyńska, and other researchers.

*Instytut na Rzecz Kultury Prawnej*<sup>3</sup> *Ordo Iuris*<sup>4</sup>, established in 2013 by the Peter Skarga Foundation, plays a prominent role in Polish political life. It prepares projects for legal opinions in various fields, and conducts both official and unofficial lobbying. It published its legal opinion concerning the LGBT+ declaration prepared by the Warsaw authorities, an instruction to the schools how to block extra lessons on hate speech after the killing of Paweł Adamowicz, Gdansk President, in January 2019 and sent instructions to prosecutors on how to identify “encouragement to abortion.” Its experts take part in public debates and play important roles on various public bodies. *Oro Iuris* lawyers participate in court cases concerning topics of Agenda Europe, propose their draft bills, and support projects implementing their agenda in parliamentary legislative procedures. Their lawyers present opinions about almost every bill or regulation concerning reproductive rights, family life, children’s rights, LGBT+ rights, or worldview issues (The Great Coalition for Equality and Choice 2020). *Ordo Iuris* advocates against the Istanbul Convention and sex education (Graff and Korolczuk 2018, 179). Analysis of its legal activities leads to the

3 In Polish Institute for Legal Culture

4 In Latin Legal Order

conclusion that its main objectives are the transformation of the state legal system in accordance with Catholic norms (Kontrewolucja kulturowo religijna 2020); two members of Polish Supreme Court had close connections to *Ordo Iuris* (Korolczuk 2020a, 167). *Ordo Iuris* also advocates for enabling pharmacists to declare a “conscience clause” (Religa 2018), they have filed criminal complaints concerning “Abortion without Borders,” a helpline for women seeking abortion; they publicly disapproved of the Gdansk program of health education for teenagers; they have published an alarming report on a municipal anti-discriminatory program in Poznan, and recommended that the Minister of Education prevent such programs by regulation; they have criticized the annual report of the European Parliament for applying terms such as “sexual and reproductive rights,” in the context of Istanbul Convention (Korolczuk 2020a); they took part in preparations of the draft bill on domestic violence, which is presented as an alternative to the Istanbul Convention and resembles the Russian bill (Kacprzak 2019). *Ordo Iuris* also seeks to have an impact in universities: it supported a lecturer at the University of Silesia who was accused by the students of spreading pro-life propaganda instead of lecturing, and they cooperated with the prosecutor and the police so closely that an *Ordo Iuris* lawyer took part in the interrogation of the students, who were treated as the accused rather than being witnesses (Hartman 2020). They sued Marta Lempart, a Women’s Strike leader, for writing that “*Ordo Iuris* is fundamentalist and paid by the Kremlin”, and Neil Datta, leader of the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights, author of reports on activities of anti-gender movement in Europe.

Klementyna Suchanow, who revealed results of her research on *Ordo Iuris*, found out that its activity is tightly connected with other organizations, like the Peter Skarga Society in Poland, or Vigilare in Croatia, and others. The most significant finding was the connection with the Polish branch of the Brazilian Tradição, Família e Propriedade (TFP), and the Tradition, Family, and Property international network has sister organizations in other countries—like CitizenGo (Brussels) and Hazte Oir (Spain). Suchanow (2020) also revealed the participation of *Ordo Iuris* in the Agenda Europe network and the Word Congress of Families. The main Croatian anti-gender organization, Vigilare, described by Amir Hodžić and Aleksandar Štulhofer (Hodžić and Štulhofer 2017) turned out to be in fact a branch of the Polish organization, the Peter Skarga Association for Christian Culture, which is connected with *Ordo Iuris*. According to Anna Mierzyńska, *Ordo Iuris* also closely cooperates with three Bulgarian partner organizations: “Свобода за всеки” [Freedom for all], “Родители обединени за децата” /ПОД [Parents United for Children], and “Асоциация Общество и Ценности” [Society and Values Society]. It is probable that further research in this field would reveal more connections in other countries. Relations between various actors and organizations collaborating within *Ordo Iuris* network are labyrinthine, where—as Kuhar and Paternotte describe it—the same actors assume different positions in different organizations: one person can be the president of one organization and a board member of another (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017b, 261).

Klementyna Suchanow also reveals close connections between Polish organizations, *Ordo Iuris* and the Father Peter Skarga Foundation and Association, and Russia, where Russian actors play the chief role. In her scheme the key actor is the Kremlin, standing behind its agents. According to Suchanow, who gives details of such connections in her book, in Poland the Kremlin’s agents act through the church, the Russian Foreign Intel-

ligence Service, the GRU, the mafia, cultural institutions, pseudo-experts, and so-called friendly voices or useful idiots (Suchanow 2020, 470).

**Table 1.** The active means of the Kremlin, according to Klementyna Suchanow (2020, 470)

Kremlin	→	Vladimir Yakunin Konstantin Malofeev oligarchs	→	CitizenGO WCF	→	Father Peter Skarga Foundation and Association	
				Agenda Europe		↕	
					→	ORDO IURIS	
	→	Putin's administra- tion	→	Igor Beloborodov RISS	→	Catholic church	
						↕	
	→	Solntsevskaya Organ- ized Crime Group GRU	→	Polish tape affair <sup>5</sup> Antoni Maciere- wicz Russian coal Mateusz Morawiecki	→	PiS (Prawo i Spraw- iedliwość) (Law and Justice)	↕
→	Leonid Sviridov Alexandr Usovski "Sputnik" <sup>6</sup> Foreign Intelligence Service?	→	Grzegorz Braun Jacek Wilk Janusz Kor- win-Mikke	→	Konfederacja (Confederation)		

Those research results, published by Klementyna Suchanow, proving the strong impact of Putin's Russia on the Polish anti-gender movement organizations (Father Peter Skarga Foundation and Association and *Ordo Iuris*) are the last, but not least, reason, to focus on Polish case.

## Conclusions

The above picture presents a network of organizations which are active on the national, European, and global levels. This is probably only the tip of the iceberg, and further investigations into the subject are necessary. The anti-gender movement and its allies succeed thanks to their strategy of hiding their agenda under a façade of democratic, inclusive, and anti-discriminatory discourse prepared according to the best public relations methods, and by building a pluralizing (and secularizing) self-image, and presenting as rational, moderate, and commonsensical actors (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017b, 264). As one of the main tactics of the movement being researched is secrecy, revealing its real objectives, strategies, and actors, and exposing them brings new results, and is crucial for not only

5 A wiretapping scandal that rocked the Polish government in 2014

6 A state-owned news agency, news website, and radio broadcast

researchers, but for European policymakers and citizens. This success results from various research activities, and through the use of various methodologies, including participative research and investigative journalism. The studies of Klementyna Suchanow – an independent researcher – is an illustration of such an approach at the local level, which resulted in a documentation of activities and the connection of the Polish branch of a transnational anti-gender fundamentalist movement, with its most prominent representative being *Ordo Iuris*. This ‘hidden’ nature of the actors in anti-democratic movements needs deeper research, as they create a real threat to the democratic pillars of European society.

The main limitations of both this paper (and research into the anti-gender movement) come from its main strategy of secrecy, which is why the most effective strategy to succeed is to focus on it. It is also difficult to estimate the real scale of international collaboration between *Ordo Iuris*, its international branches or sister organizations, or to compare the role in various countries of Central and Eastern Europe in this network, as it is kept secret. The only information available is that provided by *Ordo Iuris* or those organizations, or fragmentary data revealed by researchers or journalists.

As the analysis of this phenomenon is so difficult, and researchers still cannot agree about definitions and classifications, cooperation is necessary whenever actors adopt an anti-gender, far right, or other approach, as the subject of our research is of major importance. Not only the Russian “road to un-freedom,” but also the case of Poland should stimulate interest not only among gender-interested scholars, as the anti-gender movement and its allies create a real threat to the democratic pillars of European society.

To sum up, finally, I do agree with Kathleen Blee, that we, the researchers, should:

engage in a vast collaborative dialogue across borders of space, discipline, and situation, among scholars in academic institutions, independent and citizen scholars, political activists, readers, and voters (Blee 2018, 10).

Although equality is one of the pillars of democracy, the gender or LGBT+ dimensions of social and political transformations are still undervalued in ‘general’ social and political science. The fact that some research results are published by activists in non-academic sources does not help. Also, the camouflage adopted by hidden actors of the anti-gender movement threatening equality and democracy – its main feature according to all authors quoted here – demonstrates the lesser visibility of their influence onto those processes. That is why we need not only more research, and more publications, but also more translations and international cross-disciplinary discussions among all of us: researchers, activists, social and media journalists, and policymakers.

Also the position of research and researcher networks dealing with these issues should be supported, as we face specific difficulties, not limited to the linguistic ones. Researchers in authoritarian states have to face various political barriers and, finally, the war on Ukraine that cut off both networks between Russia and Ukraine, and international projects conducted partly in Russian, has not been replaced automatically by new ones.

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