



FEPS

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## **Conservatives vs. the “Culture of Death”**

**How progressives handled the war on “gender”?**

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1 March 2016

The FEPS Young Academics Network is organised with the support of the Renner Institut.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

FEPS Young Academics Network .....	2
Authors .....	4
Executive Summary .....	5
Introduction .....	6
Chapter 1: Overview of the Anti-Gender Campaign .....	7
1.1. Chronology and Triggers of the Campaign .....	8
1.2. Assessment of Key Actors and Their Modes of Action .....	13
Chapter 2: Typologies of Progressive Responses .....	18
2.1. Types of Reactions Depending on Scope .....	18
2.2. Types of Reactions Depending on Proactivity .....	21
2.3. Types of Reactions Depending on Comprehensiveness .....	23
2.4. Types of Reactions Depending on Target Group .....	24
2.5. Types of Reactions Depending on Means .....	26
Chapter 3: Evaluation of progressive responses to the anti-gender mobilization .....	30
Recommendations .....	38
Literature .....	41

## FEPS YOUNG ACADEMICS NETWORK

The Young Academics Network (YAN) was established in March 2009 by the Foundation of European Progressive Studies (FEPS) with the support of the Renner Institut to gather progressive PhD candidates and young PhD researchers, who are ready to use their academic experience in a debate about the Next Europe. The founding group was composed of awardees of the “Call for Paper” entitled “Next Europe, Next Left” – whose articles also help initiating the FEPS Scientific Magazine “Queries”. Quickly after, with the help of the FEPS member foundations, the group enlarged – presently incorporating around 30 outstanding and promising young academics.

FEPS YAN meets in the Viennese premises of Renner Institut, which offers great facilities for both reflections on the content and also on the process of building the network as such. Both elements constitute mutually enhancing factors, which due to innovative methods applied make this Network also a very unique project. Additionally, the groups work has been supervised by the Chair of the Next Left Research Programme, Dr. Alfred Gusenbauer – who at multiple occasions joined the sessions of the FEPS YAN, offering his feedback and guidance.

This paper is one of the results of the fourth cycle of FEPS YAN, (the first one ended with three papers in June 2011, the second one led to five papers in spring 2013, while the third one saw the publication of six papers), in which nine key themes were identified and were researched by FEPS YAN working groups. These topics encompass: *“From class struggle to struggling with class”*; *“Are e-learning platforms a promising way forward for social cohesion?”*; *“Monetary v. economic policy: A bug in the Maastricht design?”*; *“Why the Left needs Europolitics”*; *“What impact have post-crisis public policies had on gender equality in EU member states?”*; *“Capital and labour in the post-crisis European context”*; *“Promoting labour rights and social protection in post-crisis Europe”*; *“EU asylum and migration policy – Towards an integrative approach to equality”* and *“Renewable democracy: towards full participation through representation deliberation”*. Each of the meetings is an opportunity for the FEPS YAN to discuss the current state of their research, presenting their findings and questions both in the plenary, as also in the respective working groups. The added value of their work is the pan-European, innovative,

interdisciplinary character – not to mention, that it is by principle that FEPS wishes to offer a prominent place to this generation of academics, seeing in it a potential to construct alternative that can attract young people to progressivism again. Though the process is very advanced already, the FEPS YAN remains a Network – and hence is ready to welcome new participants.

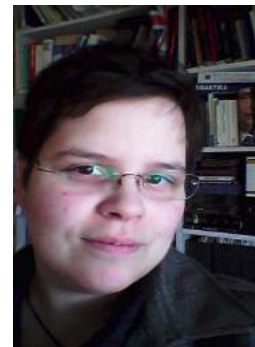
FEPS YAN plays also an important role within FEPS structure as a whole. The FEPS YAN members are asked to join different events (from large Conferences, such as FEPS “Call to Europe” or “Renaissance for Europe” and PES Convention to smaller High Level Seminars and Focus Group Meetings) and encouraged to provide inputs for publications (i.e. for FEPS Magazine “Queries”). Enhanced participation of the FEPS YAN Members in the overall FEPS life and increase of its visibility remains one of the strategic goals of the Network.

## Authors



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## Executive Summary

Transnational anti-gender mobilizations emerged almost simultaneously throughout the years 2012-2013 all over Europe, seriously challenging women's and minorities' rights, and attempting to undermine the very foundations of liberal democracy. Countries such as Croatia, Italy, France, Germany, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain became the stages of fierce attacks on gender equality and the rights of sexual minorities, as well as attempts to revoke the post-war international consensus on human rights. It was not long before progressives around Europe started to address these new conservative movements. This paper aims to present and critically evaluate these progressive reactions. First, we provide a short overview of existing academic literature and reflect on the anthropological and political foundations of the anti-gender campaign. We then provide numerous typologies of progressive responses, and follow up with their critical evaluation, pointing to broader structural causes behind the rise of anti-gender movements. Finally, we provide recommendations as to how current responses to the anti-gender campaign could be improved.

**Keywords:** anti-genderism, gender ideology, conservative politics, right wing, fundamentalism, cultural wars, progressive politics

**Hashtags:** #ReclaimGender, #UnderstandingFundamentalism, #AligningForChange, #TouchHeartsToWinOverMinds, #ProgressivesUnite

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Currently in Europe new right-wing movements and ways of conducting conservative politics are emerging. Critically addressing the workings of contemporary globalization, financial capitalism, global inequalities and economic insecurity, these conservative mobilizations challenge traditional political divisions by taking over the anti-systemic, protest role previously fulfilled by the radical left.

**One especially potent and striking example of these movements is the transnational anti-gender mobilization that** emerged almost simultaneously throughout the years 2012-2013 all over Europe, **denouncing progressive values as “the culture of death” or “gender ideology”.**

It was not long before progressive actors started to address this transnational conservative mobilization. With this paper we wish to **focus on the way progressive actors** – social movements, activists, intellectuals, political parties and NGOs – **have responded to the mobilizations.** Faced with the first signs of dire consequences of the “war on gender”, we believe it is time to critically evaluate the responses of left-wing and culturally liberal forces.

Drawing from the concept of “symbolic glue”, this paper argues that the **root causes behind anti-gender movements are the same as those behind the rise of political fundamentalism** in Europe. Evaluating various progressive responses to anti-gender mobilizations, this paper also shows that many progressives have been fighting the wrong battle. They concentrated on defeating anti-gender movements, when in fact they would be better off addressing the root causes of the rise of political fundamentalism across Europe. The end of the paper provides strategic and tactical recommendations as to the possible improvements to current responses to the anti-gender campaign.

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<sup>1</sup> The authors wish to thank the following for their comments and valuable input: Laurence Groves, Isabelle Hertner, Amir Hodžić, Eszter Kováts, Roman Kuhar, Emmanuelle Le Texier, Andrea Pető, Judit Tánzos

## Chapter 1: Overview of the Anti-Gender Campaign

In order to critically assess progressive responses to the current anti-gender mobilization, it is crucial to understand the dynamics of the campaign itself. Therefore, **this chapter intends to give a brief, state-of-the-art overview of what is already known.** Research has been rapidly developing in recent years, largely due to several international projects such as the FEPS/FES book “*Gender as Symbolic Glue*”<sup>2</sup> or the research team headed by Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte. As shown by these collaborative efforts, while the concept of “gender” lies at the center of these conservative mobilizations, they oppose a much broader spectrum of issues associated with progressive politics: gender equality and mainstreaming policies, LGBTQ+ rights, reproductive rights, sexual education, as well as the influence of transnational institutions on national law<sup>3</sup>. “Gender”, therefore, is an ideologically and symbolically loaded umbrella term used to denote all these contested issues at once.

As argued by Andrea Pető, **gender should not be conceptualized as the focal point of these campaigns, but rather as “symbolic glue” that lumps various progressive issues together**, and allows for the covering up of a deeper (...) change in the European political and value system<sup>4</sup>. Following the intuition of Pető and Chetcuti<sup>5</sup>, we too see anti-genderism not as a problem in and of itself, but rather a symptom of a broader crisis of liberal democracy, and a platform on which those disappointed with the current state of market-driven European democracy can voice their dissatisfaction and claim a sense of agency and empowerment<sup>6</sup>. In fact, the gender debate can very easily signal the creation of a new, complex cleavage in European politics, building networks between the Church, conservative parties, pro-life activists and far-right organizations. In the light of the above considerations it is worth underlining that when the

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<sup>2</sup> E. Kováts and M. Pöim (eds.), *Gender as symbolic glue. The position and role of conservative and far right parties in the anti-gender mobilizations in Europe*, FEPS and FES Budapest, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> The issue of progressive politics will be addressed in detail in Chapters 2. and 3. Here we would like to note that for the purpose of this analysis, we employ a broad definition of the term “progressive” as **culturally liberal, that is, one that** stresses the importance of individual rights and freedoms, and places gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights within the general framework of human rights.

<sup>4</sup> A. Pető, „Anti-gender” mobilisational discourse of conservative and far right parties as a challenge for progressive politics, [In:] *Gender as symbolic glue...*, p. 127.

<sup>5</sup> N. Chetcuti, *Quand les questions de genre et d'homosexualités deviennent un enjeu républicain*, Les Temps Modernes 2014/2 n° 678, p. 241-253, <http://www.cairn.info/revue-les-temps-modernes-2014-2-page-241.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> See also W. Grzebalska, *What gender issues are missing from the current political debate?*, statement for “Passing on the torch. The legacy of the Beijing Platform for Action and new, grassroots feminist movements”, 20 October 2015, European Parliament.



buzzword “gender ideology” is evoked in a political debate, **there is no point in distinguishing between various mobilizations based on their particular target** (eg. women's rights, marriage equality, sex reassignment or sexual education) because that would obscure the very character of the mobilizations in question. Namely, the fact that they use “gender” as an umbrella term for a wider scope of issues.

### 1.1. Chronology and Triggers of the Campaign

Conservative mobilization against gender equality and the advancement of minority rights are by no means a new phenomenon. It has long been present on the agenda of the Catholic Church, religious and right-wing organizations. The 1990s bore witness to a similar wave of resistance: several attempts of national churches to restrict reproductive rights, e.g. in Belgium and Poland<sup>7</sup>, as well as a fierce campaign against sexual education carried out by the Christian Right in the United States<sup>8</sup>. In fact, **the term “gender ideology” itself was coined by the Catholic Church in response to United Nations conferences in Cairo and Beijing<sup>9</sup>.**

This continuity notwithstanding, the period around the **years 2012-2013 marks a significant turning point** for the previously relatively stable human rights consensus in Europe: in several countries, gender equality, sexual education and LGBTQ+ rights have become the target of interrelated attacks conducted by Church officials, faith-based grassroots organizations, conservative civil movements and right-wing politicians, and have been brought to unprecedented public attention lumped under the term “gender ideology” (or “gender theory” in France and “genderism” in Germany). As researchers from France, Germany, Poland and Slovakia have pointed out, while the term “gender ideology” has sporadically appeared on the Internet before, it only just recently entered public discourse in Europe<sup>10</sup>. But it is not just the slogans that have changed. As David Paternotte observes, these recent mobilizations also

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<sup>7</sup> J. Heinen and S. Portet, *Religion, Politics and Gender Equality in Poland*, final research report, UNRISD and Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> J. M. Irvine, *Talk about Sex: The Battles Over Sex Education in the United States*, University of California Press, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> D. E. Buss, *Robes, Relics and Rights: the Vatican and the Beijing Conference on Women*, [In:] Social & Legal Studies, Sage Publications, Vol. 7(3), p. 339-363.

<sup>10</sup> E. Kováts and M. Põim (eds.), *Gender as symbolic glue. The position and role of conservative and far right parties in the anti-gender mobilizations in Europe*, FEPS – FES Budapest, 2015.

display new discourses and forms of organization, attempts by established conservative actors to reach beyond their traditional circles and connect with a wider audience<sup>11</sup>.

In Europe, one of **the first instances of this new type of conservative mobilization** under the aegis of “gender ideology” **have been observed in southern countries**. In Croatia, the anti-gender movement began to form in 2007 around the conservative *Experimental Program of Health Education* proposed by the Association GROZD which the government decided to implement<sup>12</sup>. In Slovenia, conservatives started mobilizing in 2009 against the new Family Code, which would have allowed same-sex couples to marry and adopt children. In reaction to the bill, a public movement *The Civil Initiative for the Family and Rights of Children* was created to support a referendum, which eventually led to the rejection of the proposal in 2012<sup>13</sup>. After the Slovenian Parliament passed a law in March 2015 allowing gay couples to marry and adopt children, the mobilization continued: members of a CSO called *Za otroke gre* (For children) turned to the Constitutional Court and the latter allowed for a referendum which could eventually overturn the law. The referendum took place on 20<sup>th</sup> of December and the bill legalizing same-sex marriage was rejected<sup>14</sup>. At the same time in Croatia, a civil initiative, *Citizens Voting Against* was formed, demanding constitutional ban on same-sex marriage after the Prime Minister announced in 2012 the plan to expand the rights of same-sex couples. A year later, the ban was adopted<sup>15</sup>. In Spain, the campaign was triggered by the 2010 law decriminalizing abortion which was met with fierce opposition from the Church, pro-life groups and the People’s Party. In 2012, the government approved a draft banning abortion only to withdraw it later due to a lack of consensus. In the aftermath of the decision, a public protest of at least 60.000 citizens took place in Madrid.

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<sup>11</sup> D. Paternotte, *Christian trouble: The Catholic Church and the Subversion of Gender*, [In:] Council for European Studies, May 8, 2014, <http://councilforeuropeanstudies.org/critcom/christian-trouble-the-catholic-church-and-the-subversion-of-gender/>.

<sup>12</sup> See: <http://stoprso.cesi.hr/indexen.html>.

<sup>13</sup> See: R. Kuhar, *Playing with science: Sexual citizenship and the Roman Catholic Church counter-narratives in Slovenia and Croatia*, [In:] Women’s Studies International Forum, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2014.07.005>.

<sup>14</sup> M. Novak, *Slovenia rejects same-sex marriages in a referendum*, [In:] Reuters, December 20, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-slovenia-rights-idUSKBN0U30BS20151220>.

<sup>15</sup> See: *ibidem* and Hodžić et al. *Neo-conservative threats to sexual and reproductive health & rights in the European Union*, CESI, 2014.

In 2011 in France, Union for Popular Movement MPs put forward a demand to remove “gender theory” from school textbooks. But it wasn’t until 2012-2013 that *La Manif pour tous*, a massive grassroots movement opposing same-sex marriage, brought thousands of people to the streets from November 17, 2012 onwards. While the French mobilization started out as a campaign against same-sex marriage, it soon expanded into a protest against the more general threat of “gender theory”<sup>16</sup>. In January 2014, thousands of parents pulled their children from schools in protest of the alleged deprivation of children by “gender theory”. Similarly in Germany, demonstrations called *Demo für Alle* were organized in various cities in 2014, protesting school sexual education classes as a platform for imposing “gender ideology” on children and families<sup>17</sup>. In Italy, just like in France, same-sex couples' rights and school textbooks were used to consolidate a conservative movement and carry out demonstrations, one of which was organized under the slogan “Let's Defend Our Children”<sup>18 19</sup>.

Analogous campaigns started across Central Eastern Europe. In Poland, the anti-gender outbreak happened in the years 2012-2013 and evolved around three triggers: the Istanbul Convention, which was opposed by the Polish Minister of Justice as a vehicle of “feminist ideology”; WHO recommendations concerning sexual education in schools, which led to the mobilization of parents backed up by Catholic NGOs, Church officials and right-wing politicians; and the pedophilia scandal in the Polish Church, which was addressed by the Archbishop of Poland in a speech that shifted the responsibility for pedophilia from the Church to broken families, and blamed feminists for the crisis of “family values”<sup>20</sup>. In 2013, the debates about “gender ideology” were so ubiquitous in Poland that “gender” was chosen word of the

<sup>16</sup> See: D. Paternotte, *ibid.*, and G. Brustier, *France*, [In:] Gender as symbolic glue. The position and role of conservative and far right parties in the anti-gender mobilizations in Europe, (ed.) E. Kováts and M. Pöim, FEPS – FES Budapest, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> A. Blum, *Germany*, [In:] Gender as symbolic glue. The position and role of conservative and far right parties in the anti-gender mobilizations in Europe, (ed.) E. Kováts and M. Pöim, FEPS – FES Budapest, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> See: A. Gagliarducci, *Church in Italy fights against imposition of gender ideology in schools*, [In:] Catholic News Agency, January 31, 2015, <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/church-in-italy-fights-against-imposition-of-gender-ideology-in-schools-26494/>.

<sup>19</sup> See: E. Pentin, *'We Are a Million' Marchers for Marriage in Rome*, [In:] National Catholic Register, June 22, 2015, <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/one-million-marchers-for-marriage-in-rome>.

<sup>20</sup> See: W. Grzebalska, *Poland*, [In:] Gender as symbolic glue. The position and role of conservative and far right parties in the anti-gender mobilizations in Europe, (ed.) E. Kováts and M. Pöim, FEPS – FES Budapest, 2015., E. Korolczuk, *„The War on Gender” from a Transnational Perspective – Lessons for Feminist Strategising*, Heinrich Böll Stiftung Warsaw, 2014., M. Grabowska, *Cultural war or „business as usual”? Recent instances, and the historical origins, of a „backlash” against women's and sexual rights in Poland*, Heinrich Böll Stiftung Warsaw, 2014., A. Graff, *Report from the gender trenches*, [In:] European Journal of Women's Studies, Vol. 2., 2014.

year by experts in linguistics. While the Istanbul Convention was eventually ratified by President Komorowski in April 2015, recent developments point to the continuing salience of the anti-gender rhetoric in Poland. In October 2015, the newly-elected President Duda vetoed a transgender rights bill, and coalition of pro-life NGOs petitioned the Parliament to withdraw the morning after pill. Additionally, after winning the recent parliamentary elections, the Law and Justice party canceled a publicly funded IVF scheme, and its MPs continue to target “gender ideology” in their statements.

**In Slovakia**, the anti-gender mobilization was triggered by the preparation for the adoption of two EU related documents – “*Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017*” and “*The National Strategy for Human Rights Protection and Promotion*” – as well as the draft bill on civil partnerships submitted in August 2012<sup>21</sup>. These issues stirred opposition from the Church and gave impetus to a civil movement called *Alliance for the Family* which was established as a means to fight threats to the traditional family. As a result, an amendment to the constitution was introduced in 2014 which banned same-sex marriage, and a referendum was held to stop sexual minorities from seeing their rights recognized in the future (due to low electoral turnout, the referendum was invalid). **In Russia**, the LGBTQ+ Propaganda Law, which aimed to protect minors from exposure to “the propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations”, was signed into law in June 2013. In aftermath, legislators across Asian and Eastern European countries such as Belarus, Moldova, Kazakstan, Kyrgystan and Ukraine, have been trying to introduce analogous laws in their countries.<sup>22</sup> In the EU, attempts at introducing a similar Russian-style Anti-Gay Propaganda law which would ban public displays defying traditional family values, have been made in Latvia and Lithuania. In the former, anti-LGBT groups have so far failed at collecting signatures for the referendum. In the latter, the law has been discussed extensively by the Parliament in 2014, and is expected to be on the parliamentary agenda again<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> P. Durinová, *Slovakia*, [In:] Gender as symbolic glue. The position and role of conservative and far right parties in the anti-gender mobilizations in Europe, (ed.) E. Kováts and M. Põim, FEPS – FES Budapest, 2015., and Z. Bútorová, *Slovakia’s Presidential Election: When Playing the Conservative Card Doesn’t Work*, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, April 7, 2014, <https://www.boell.de/en/2014/04/07/slovakias-presidential-election-when-playing-conservative-card-doesnt-work>.

<sup>22</sup> *Spread of Russian-Style Anti-Propaganda Laws*, [In:] February 27, 2014, <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/spread-russian-style-anti-propaganda-laws>.

<sup>23</sup> *Lithuanian Parliament to Vote on Russian Style “Anti-Gay Propaganda” Law Again*, [In:] Lgl.lt, November 10, 2015, <http://www.lgl.lt/en/?p=11403>.

The **gender ideology debate was also orchestrated at the level of key EU institutions** and - most importantly - the **European Parliament**.<sup>24</sup> The European political system is a complex system where political parties, political groups and institutions meet with lots of lobbying pressure and information lobbying, e.g. from NGOs and lobby groups. These actors not only provide sector or country specific information to decision makers but often also come up with ready-made amendments and arguments that MEPs can use during hearings and meetings. One particularly means of action employed by these NGOs is contesting and reformulating the wording of the reports dedicated to on gender and sexuality issues. NGOs operating in Brussels and Strasbourg have often been found to inform like-minded MEPs about the perceived dangers of the report, spam adversary MEPs, threaten those very same MEPs or simply suggest that the word “gender” be replaced by a more family-friendly equivalent (e.g. “women and children”). Alongside NGOs, some MEPs from the ECR group and the EPP group have repeatedly criticized the use of the word “gender” within all EU documents and institutions since 2013.

The first widely publicized instance when the anti-gender debate appeared in the European Parliament was the negotiation of the so-called Estrela report on sexual and reproductive health and rights in 2013. As a result of the smear campaign carried out by conservative politicians and civil society organizations (CSOs) like the CitizenGO website, Edit Estrela, the author of the report, has been inundated with hostile messages and sometimes even direct threats. A similar heated anti-gender debate and mobilization took place in the case of the so-called Lunacek report, a report on the EU roadmap against homophobia and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. Likewise, in 2015 the Tarabella Report on progress in equality between women and men in the European Union in 2013 was also attacked by conservatives because of its stipulations on sexual and reproductive health rights. Some even argued that by promoting reproductive health rights as a basic human right, the report is supporting “child butchering”. The so-called Noichl report on the EU Strategy for equality between women and men post 2015 has been the latest victim of this ideological debate, attacked on a wide

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<sup>24</sup> For more about anti-genderism on the EU level, see: E. Kováts, M. Põim and J. Tánzos, *Beyond gender? Anti-gender mobilization and the lessons for progressives*, [In:] <http://www.feps-europe.eu/assets/335b5eeb-68cd-4e9f-a565-4cbd61088bf8/feps-fes-policy-brief-finalpdf.pdf> >.

range of issues including abortion, medically assisted procreation, LGBT rights and gender mainstreaming.

## 1.2. Assessment of Key Actors and Their Modes of Action

While each national mobilization evolved around **country-specific triggers** and followed a distinct scenario, scholars have already pointed to **significant commonalities** between national cases. These include:

- 1.) the involvement of similar actors – the Vatican and national branches of the Roman Catholic Church (or Orthodox Church in Russia), faith-based and lay conservative CSOs, and right-wing political parties,
- 2.) as well as the transnational character of the mobilization: the transfer of knowledge and practices, as well as financial and personal connections between them<sup>25</sup>.

Commentators of the different campaigns are unanimous in their assertion about the **involvement of the Roman Catholic Church**. As observed by David Paternotte<sup>26</sup>, this involvement has taken different forms depending on specific national circumstances and has varied from providing the anthropological and discursive basis to the campaigns, through funding of NGOs and protest movements, up to and including direct participation or leadership during mobilizations.

**The ideological and discursive basis of the currently used anti-gender rhetoric can be traced back to papal writings** and other documents of the Catholic Church<sup>27</sup>. The anthropological foundations of the anti-gender movement were laid by Pope John Paul II in his groundbreaking work *“Theology of the Body”*, which contained addresses from 1979 to 1984, as well as in the 1988 apostolic letter *“Mulieris*

<sup>25</sup> See: Graff, *ibidem*, p. 434, and Korolczuk, *ibidem*.

<sup>26</sup> D. Paternotte, *ibidem*.

<sup>27</sup> See: S. Garbagnoli, *Le Vatican contre la dénaturalisation de l'ordre sexuel : structure et enjeux d'un discours institutionnel réactionnaire*, [In:] Synergies Italie, No. 10, 2014, p. 145-167., M. A. Case, *After Gender The Destruction of Man? The Vatican's Nightmare Vision of the “Gender Agenda” for Law*, [In:] Pace Law Review, Vol. 31. No.3., 2011, p. 802-817., D. Couture, *L'antiféminisme du “nouveau féminisme” préconisé par le Saint-Siège*, [In:] Recherches féministes, Vol. 25. No. 1., 2012, p. 15-35.

*Dignitatem – On the Dignity and Vocation of Women*” and the 1995 “*Letter to Women*” read on the occasion of the UN Conference in Beijing. These texts are often referred to as “new feminism” due to the fact that they are against violence and discriminatory power structures between men and women, yet they oppose the analytical separation of the concepts of sex and gender. In these texts, John Paul II introduced the influential essentialist idea of the complementarity of the sexes, that is, the view that men and women not only complement each other but are also defined by their relationship towards one another: *Womanhood and manhood are complementary not only from the physical and psychological points of view, but also from the ontological. It is only through the duality of the “masculine” and the “feminine” that the “human” finds full realization*<sup>28</sup>. Pope Benedict XVI not only sustained the views of his predecessor but also explicitly condemned “gender ideology” on the occasion of Christmas greetings to the Roman Curia in 2008 and 2012<sup>29</sup>. One should note, however, that while the statements of Pope Francis often place him in the camp of religious progressives (mostly because of his famous quote: “If a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge?”), his gender-related theology is, in fact, in line with the interpretations of his predecessors. The Pope reiterated several times that he considered marriage as a sacrament between a man and a woman, openly argued against “gender ideology” and “gender theory”, and in his latest encyclical, *Ludato si*, argued in favor of sexual complementarity and suggested that transgender people should accept the body they are assigned at birth<sup>30</sup>. One should also note that the issue of “gender ideology” reportedly came up during the Synod on the family organized in October 2015 in the Vatican, though the Pope is only expected to react to the outcome of the discussions by mid-2016.

Because papal works are demanding texts, in order to reach wide audiences, **they needed to undergo the process of interpretation and simplification**. This process was carried out by the Vatican itself (e.g. in the form of the 2003 “*Lexicon of Ambiguous and Debatable Terms Regarding Family Life and Ethical Questions*” or the “*Humanum*” youtube channel), by lay Catholic conservative authors (e.g. Tony

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<sup>28</sup> *Letter of John Paul II to women*, June 29, 1995, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1995/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_29061995\\_women.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1995/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_29061995_women.html).

<sup>29</sup> See: A. Favier, *Catholics and gender. A Historical Approach*, [In:] Books and Ideas, March 16, 2015, <http://www.booksandideas.net/Catholics-and-gender.html>.

<sup>30</sup> *The Pope's take on transgender issues? Accept the body God gave you*, [In:] Catholic News Agency, June 18, 2015, <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/the-popes-take-on-transgender-issues-accept-the-body-god-gave-you-56797/>.

Anatrella (2012) Gabriele Kuby (2006), Marguerite A. Peeters (2013), Lucetta Scaraffia, Michel Schooyans (2001) or Christine de Marcellus de Vollmer<sup>31</sup>), and by national bishops and priests (e.g. Archbishop Józef Michalik and Fr. Dariusz Oko in Poland). It was **the work of these Catholic intellectuals that** enabled the concept of “gender ideology” to enter political debates and the lives of ordinary citizens.

CSOs, faith-based or lay conservative citizens’ groups are also significant actors of anti-gender mobilizations. As listed by Elżbieta Korolczuk, these groups include international and transnational NGOs specializing in lobbying and litigation at the level of transnational institutions (e.g. *The European Centre for Law and Justice* in Strasbourg or the *European Dignity Watch* based in Brussels); national and local conservative NGOs focusing on protecting family values (e.g. “*Healthy Family*” Association in Poland); grassroots mobilizations of “concerned citizens” (e.g. *La Manif Pour Tous* in France and *Demo für Alle* in Germany); as well as websites, online groups and open platforms serving as a means to disseminate information and mobilize support for petitions and protests<sup>32</sup>. As Roman Kuhar observed, **these organizations often present themselves as independent mobilizations of concerned citizens**, rely on the authority of “experts”, and use ostensibly rational, scientific discourse<sup>33</sup>. One notable example is the media presence of Fr. Dariusz Oko, a Polish priest and holder of two PhD degrees, who often uses custom-made boards with skillfully selected, unsourced statistics in his television appearances. Despite the ostensible neutrality of the anti-gender CSOs, some investigative journalists and activists conducting network analyses revealed the many personal, business and financial relationships between them, the Catholic Church and its satellite institutions. In Croatia, activists from the “*Citizens Vote Against*” group exposed *On Behalf of the Family’s* connections with *Opus Dei*<sup>34</sup>. Close scrutiny of both the connections between CSOs and the Church, and the discursive strategies employed by the former in Slovenia and

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<sup>31</sup> See e.g. See: A. Favier, *Catholics and gender. A Historical Approach*, [In:] Books and Ideas, March 16, 2015, <http://www.booksandideas.net/Catholics-and-gender.html>. .

<sup>32</sup> E. Korolczuk, *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> R. Kuhar, *Playing with science: Sexual citizenship and the Roman Catholic Church counter-narratives in Slovenia and Croatia*, Women’s Studies International Forum, 2014.

<sup>34</sup> D. Ćurković, *Against the Wars in Croatia: Sacrifice of democracy in the name of marriage*, [In:] Lupiga.com, December 1, 2013.



Croatia, led Roman Kuhar to argue that they should be perceived as the **“clericalization” of society through the secularization of Church discourse**<sup>35</sup>.

In some countries, center-right, mainstream right and far-right political parties were also a significant actor of the campaign, perceiving it as a chance to gain recognizability and votes.<sup>36</sup> As observed by Gaël Brustier, during the local elections in France, **“gender ideology” discourse has been targeted specifically at immigrant neighborhoods**, in an attempt to pull socially conservative immigrant voters away from left-wing parties<sup>37</sup>. The use of the anti-gender discourse as a **voters mobilization strategy was particularly apparent in Poland**, where the concept was widely referred to by right-wing politicians during the local and European election campaigns of 2014. Three right-wing parties (Law and Justice, United Poland and National Movement) directly mentioned “gender ideology” in their 2014 political programs<sup>38</sup>. In January 2014, UP MPs formed a parliamentary committee “Stop Gender Ideology!” to protect the *gender identity of a human being (...) and the rights of traditional family*<sup>39</sup>. The Committee issued various appeals, hosted lectures (Gabriele Kuby), as well as organized meetings in medium and small towns around the country. While Slovak (KDH, OĽANO, SNS, ĽSNS), French (FN, UMP) and German right-wing parties (NPD, AFD, CDU) did not directly mention “gender ideology” in their party programs, they nonetheless underscored the centrality of the traditional family, and also referred to “gender ideology” on their websites and in the interviews and speeches given by their members. **Slovakia, right wing political parties openly supported the anti-same-sex marriage referendum** and even helped gather signatures on the referendum petition<sup>40</sup>. In France, the General Secretary of UMP used the moral panic around “gender theory” to denounce the Minister of Education (Najat Vallaud-Belkacem) as a “gender ideologue”, and *La Manif pour tous* tried to engage municipal candidates by encouraging them to sign the “pro-family” charter of the movement. **The analysis of the signatories in 2014 shows that the**

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<sup>35</sup> R. Kuhar, *ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>36</sup> While putting these various sides of the right-wing spectrum in one box might raise eyebrows, it is important to note that in many national contexts these parties shared striking similarities in their use of the term “gender”, thus further supporting our opening argument that “gender ideology” serves as a platform for the cooperation between various right-wing actors in an attempt to redefine liberal democracy. For case studies supporting this claim see: E. Kováts and M. Põim (eds.), *Gender as symbolic glue...*

<sup>37</sup> G. Brustier, *ibid.* p. 34.

<sup>38</sup> W. Grzebalska, *ibidem.*

<sup>39</sup> „Parlamentarny Zespół Stop Ideologii gender! Regulamin” [Parliamentary Committee Stop Gender Ideology! Regulations], p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> P. Durinová, *ibid.* p. 109-110.

call was most appealing to FN candidates in the biggest cities of France<sup>41</sup>. In Germany, local party structures were active in denouncing gender studies and the CDU in Nordwürttemberg even passed a vote against “gender ideology” in 2014<sup>42</sup>.

Along with the shift from Biblical to “scientific” language by the Church and its satellite organizations<sup>43</sup>, another discursive strategy can be observed on the part of the anti-gender campaigners, namely, **the use of fear-arousing and hyperbolic language which lumps gender equality and LGBTQ+ issues together with sexual deviations and social pathologies**. After Irvine<sup>44</sup>, Elżbieta Korolczuk calls this language “evocative vocabularies” and argues that *conservative activists use misinformation and emotionally-laden, hyperbolic language deliberately and skillfully in order to mobilize populations*<sup>45</sup>. Another aspect of the anti-gender discourse observed by commentators is its reliance on anti-colonial rhetoric and imageries. In Central Eastern Europe in particular, the EU and UN were often pictured as cultural colonizers, imposing foreign values on national collectives and far-right and fundamentalist groups presented themselves as “freedom fighters” and protectors of the national essence<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> S. Mouillard and M. Piquemal, *Le FN à fond sur la charte de la Manif pour tous*, [In:] Liberation, February 27, 2014, [http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2014/02/27/le-fn-a-fond-sur-la-charte-de-la-manif-pour-tous\\_983306](http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2014/02/27/le-fn-a-fond-sur-la-charte-de-la-manif-pour-tous_983306).

<sup>42</sup> A. Blum, *ibid.*, p. 50-51.

<sup>43</sup> R. Kuhar, *ibidem*.

<sup>44</sup> J. M. Irvine, *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> E. Korolczuk, *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>46</sup> See papers in “Gender as symbolic glue...”: A. Felix, p. 68-69; W. Grzebalska, p. 92; A. Pető, p. 127.

## Chapter 2: Typologies of Progressive Responses

Although the term “**progressive**” often serves as an empty signifier which acquires different meanings depending on the context, Eschle and Maiguashca<sup>47</sup> argue it is **best understood as a normative concept used for evaluating various practices on the grounds of three principles: inclusivity, reflexivity and prefiguration**<sup>48</sup>. While we will return to these principles when assessing selected reactions in Chapter 3, for the purpose of **this typology of progressive counteractions** the term “**progressive**” will be used in a **slightly broader sense, and applied to a wide scope of culturally liberal responses** (that stress the importance of individual rights and freedoms, and place gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights within the general framework of human rights). The actors involved in the counter-mobilization included different CSOs and social movements, left-wing or liberal political parties, journalists and media personalities, national and local governments, academics and public intellectuals, as well as transnational institutions such as the European Committee of Social Rights<sup>49</sup>.

Examples of progressive counteractions presented in this typology have been gathered through **desk research** relying predominantly on online resources, as well as through **personal conversations** with activists and academics from countries affected by the campaign. The latter were enabled in large part by thematic workshops organized in 2015 by FEPS in Brussels and FES in Budapest.

### 2.1. Types of Reactions Depending on Scope

- **European level.** Transnational responses have so far been mostly limited to Europe and included strategic meetings and policy briefs at the level of EU institutions, as well as **international academic and activist cooperative projects** that aimed at a transfer of knowledge and practices between different countries, and the development of a common analytical framework. One of the few strategic undertakings carried out at the transatlantic level was the panel dedicated to gendered mobilization of right wing parties which was organized by FEPS,

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<sup>47</sup> C. Eschle and B. Maiguascha, *Reclaiming Feminist Futures: Co-opted and Progressive Politics in a Neo-liberal Age*, [In:] *Political Studies*, Vol. 62, 2014, p. 634-651.

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem, p. 647.

<sup>49</sup> See: [http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/socialcharter/ECSR/ECSRdefault\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/socialcharter/ECSR/ECSRdefault_en.asp).

Jean Jaurès Foundation and Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in October 2011 as part of the Third Transatlantic Seminar on Gender Equality. As observed by FEPS policy advisor Judit Tánczos, this panel initiated interest on the topic of right wing and gender on the part of FEPS, and the Foundation has since been working on both “raising awareness about the issue, and preparing a proactive progressive agenda to anti-gender mobilizations”<sup>50</sup>. In 2012, FEPS journal *Queries* dedicated a whole section to the emergent topic of conservative mobilizations and gender, which was meaningfully titled “Regaining Women’s Support – Vanquishing Right Wing Extremism”, and in 2015 FEPS published a policy brief “Tackling the backlash of gender equality with progressive tools”<sup>51</sup>, and cooperated with the Budapest branch of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung on an international research project about the role of conservative and far right parties in anti-gender mobilizations in Europe, followed by the summary paper titled “Beyond gender? Anti-gender mobilization and the lessons for progressives”<sup>52</sup>.

While writing this report, we were able to consult staff training materials and public intelligence briefs<sup>53</sup> dedicated to anti-genderism and used by the S&D group. These are a clear sign that the S&D group understands that there is a coordinated conservative political action against certain progressive values and policies, and began to address the issue at its own level. On the other hand, it can be argued that European political parties in general, most notably the Party of European Socialists (PES), have not paid sufficient attention to the current wave of anti-genderism. An on-site Google search at [www.pes.eu](http://www.pes.eu), using the keywords “gender ideology”,

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<sup>50</sup> Conversation with Judit Tánczos.

<sup>51</sup> M. Põim, Out of the Deadlock: *Tackling the backlash of gender equality with progressive tools*, March 2015, <http://www.feps-europe.eu/en/publications/details/297>.

<sup>52</sup> E. Kováts, M. Põim and J. Tánczos, *Beyond gender? Anti-gender mobilization and the lessons for progressives*, [In:] <http://www.feps-europe.eu/assets/335b5eeb-68cd-4e9f-a565-4cbd61088bf8/feps-fes-policy-brief-finalpdf.pdf> >

<sup>53</sup> Intelligence reports are available online and include: “Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: The Basics”, <http://www.epfweb.org/node/162>; “EPF Voting Analysis on the European Parliament Report on «Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights»”.

“gender theory”, “manif pour tous”, “demo für alle”, “marriage equality” and “gay marriage” gave zero results as of May 25, 2015. Moreover, **anti-gender mobilizations seem to be approached by parties in the EP predominantly as a policy problem** (as in the case of the Estrela and the Lunaček reports) **rather than a political one**, and the parties have not begun to systematically analyze and address the issue as an important transnational political challenge.

Along with EU-level initiatives there were also some notable examples of international collaborative projects between academics and activists, e.g. “III International Gender Workshop” organized by the Heinrich Böll Foundation and the resulting volume “*Anti-Gender Movements on the Rise; the Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Religious and Political Mobilizations against Equality*”<sup>54</sup> volume edited by David Paternotte and Roman Kuhar; as well as bilateral exchanges of activists, such as the one organized in Maribor by the *Peace Institute and Open Society Initiative for Europe* in November 2014. A different kind of international cooperation against the campaign was initiated by the *Croatian Civic Coalition Stop High-risk Sexual Education* which managed to gain support for their agenda of around 100 organizations<sup>55</sup>.

- **National level.** As mobilizations against “gender ideology” began, it was **not unusual for activists and academics to view them as national occurrences**, especially since the campaigns predominantly target issues that come under government jurisdiction. For example, in Poland, commentators such as liberal film director Agnieszka Holland<sup>56</sup> or the leader of leftist *Political Critique* Sławomir Sierakowski<sup>57</sup> interpreted the anti-gender campaign as a strategy on the part of the Polish Catholic Church to divert attention from

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<sup>54</sup> R. Kuhar, D. Paternotte (eds.), *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Religious and Political Mobilizations against Equality*, Rowman & Littlefield (forthcoming 2017).

<sup>55</sup> See: <http://stoprso.cesi.hr/eng/koalicija.html>.

<sup>56</sup> J. Kuisz and K. Wigura, *Poland’s Gender Dispute*, [In:] Eurozine, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2014-03-28-wiguraen.html>, 28 March, 2014.

<sup>57</sup> S. Sierakowski, *The Polish Church’s Gender Problem*, [In:] New York Times, 26 January, 2014 <[http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/27/opinion/sierakowski-the-polish-churchs-gender-problem.html?\\_r=4](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/27/opinion/sierakowski-the-polish-churchs-gender-problem.html?_r=4)>.

the pedophilia scandal in its ranks. The French case has also been interpreted on a national level<sup>58</sup>.

- **Local level.** Local politics has been an important stage of current mobilizations, with **local authorities engaging in the anti-gender campaign** by issuing statements and opposing certain programs. Some mobilizations have been successfully contained on the local level as well, e.g. in Polish city Gdańsk an appeal by a right wing councilwoman to not extend a rent agreement with a feminist NGO Network for East-West Women was turned down in voting by centre-right Civic Platform councilpeople. Other local mobilizations were responded to both on the local and national level. For instance, when French anti-gender activists led by the call of a conservative blog, the *Salon beige*<sup>59</sup>, began to pressure local libraries and authorities to withdraw certain books from the shelves, librarians brought the issue to their national professional association and thus made it part of the national political agenda, which lead the French Minister of Culture to publicly denounce the tactics of conservatives<sup>60</sup>. The latter example demonstrates the heuristic nature of our typology: **political challenges and responses often float between different levels of action.**

## 2.2. Types of Reactions Depending on Proactivity

- **Reactive.** In most cases, the anti-gender mobilization has **taken progressives by surprise**. Therefore, the vast majority of counter-actions were developed on the spot, and were motivated by either the intention to protect activists and academics from the attacks (such as setting up the

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<sup>58</sup> See: N. Chetcuti, *ibidem*.

<sup>59</sup> A., Sigel, "Théorie du genre": les bibliothèques vont-elles céder aux pressions?, [In:] Bfmtv.fr, February 12, 2014, <http://www.bfmtv.com/societe/theorie-genre-bibliotheques-vont-elles-ceder-aux-pressions-708864.html>.

<sup>60</sup> Le Monde, « Théorie » du genre : Aurélie Filippetti dénonce des pression contre des bibliothèques, [In:] Le Monde, February 10, 2014, [http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2014/02/10/theorie-du-genre-aurelie-filippetti-denonce-les-pressions-contre-des-bibliotheques\\_4363880\\_823448.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2014/02/10/theorie-du-genre-aurelie-filippetti-denonce-les-pressions-contre-des-bibliotheques_4363880_823448.html).

Polish Gender Association<sup>61</sup>, responsible for defending the academic value of gender research and taking legal action on behalf of gender experts), or the will to stop the campaign from escalating further (e.g. counter-mobilizations against referendums in Croatia and Slovakia, counter-demonstrations against *La Manif pour tous* in France). In France, the Socialist Party offered its financial and logistic help to organize counter-manifestations<sup>62</sup>. Some spontaneous counter-actions (like the use of the controversial concept “gender theory” by progressive politicians, instantly refuted by gender specialists<sup>63</sup>) **even strengthened the argumentation of anti-gender activists**. The use of the language of anti-gender activists suggested that progressives did not unanimously believe in their own values and agenda. Sometimes even top progressive political leaders contributed to this belief, including the French president, who was rumored to be hesitant about his own gay marriage proposal (he also publicly backpedaled on the issue of the conscience clause of mayors<sup>64</sup>). Civic social media campaigns are also part of these reactive actions.

- **Proactive.** On the other side of the spectrum lie proactive actions, that is, those that do not engage in “firefighting” but rather focus on long-term planning. For instance, even though in Hungary the anti-gender campaign has not started yet<sup>65</sup>, the Budapest branch of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung has been facilitating dialogue between conservative, left-wing and liberal actors by organizing events dedicated to the topic from autumn 2013 onwards<sup>66</sup>. These were designed as a means to address the root causes of anti-genderism’s appeal, initiate critical self-reflection on the part of progressives, and build bridges between the adversaries by working out a common

<sup>61</sup> *Polskie Towarzystwo Genderowe im. Marii Skłodowskiej-Curie i Mikołaja Kopernika* was finally registered in May 2015, but the efforts to formalize date back to late 2013.

<sup>62</sup> Dhellemes, G., *Les socialistes à l'offensive sur le mariage gay* [In:] Le Point, January 17, 2013, [http://www.lepoint.fr/politique/les-socialistes-a-l-offensive-sur-le-mariage-gay-17-01-2013-1615946\\_20.php](http://www.lepoint.fr/politique/les-socialistes-a-l-offensive-sur-le-mariage-gay-17-01-2013-1615946_20.php).

<sup>63</sup> L. Bereni, et al., *La théorie du genre : réponse au ministre Vincent Peillon*, [In:] Liberation, June 10, 2014, [http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2013/06/10/la-theorie-du-genre-reponse-au-ministre-vincent-peillon\\_909686](http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2013/06/10/la-theorie-du-genre-reponse-au-ministre-vincent-peillon_909686).

<sup>64</sup> [Mariage gay : François Hollande retire la mention de la "liberté de conscience" des maires dans la future loi](http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/2012/11/21/mariage-gay-francois-hollande-retire-mention-liberte-conscience-maires-future-loi_n_2170900.html), [In:] HuffingtonPost.fr, November 21, 2012, [http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/2012/11/21/mariage-gay-francois-hollande-retire-mention-liberte-conscience-maires-future-loi\\_n\\_2170900.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/2012/11/21/mariage-gay-francois-hollande-retire-mention-liberte-conscience-maires-future-loi_n_2170900.html).

<sup>65</sup> E. Kováts and E. Soós, *Félelem a dominó-elvtől? A gender-ellenes európai mobilizáció jelensége. Francia esettanulmány Is magyar kilátások*, Társadalmi Nemek Tudománya Interdiszciplináris Folyóirat, 2014/2, p. 106-124; A. Féix, Hungary, In: *Gender as symbolic glue...*, p. 62-82.

<sup>66</sup> See eg. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O82sWwjeT8I&feature=youtu.be>

language for addressing gender issues, and facilitating alliances which could help curb the anti-gender mobilization if it occurs<sup>67</sup>. Another actor which has been consistently dedicated to building an independent progressive strategy has been FEPS. Ever since the 3rd Transatlantic gender seminar in 2011 the Foundation has stressed the need to develop a proactive response in order for feminism not to become a reactionary movement<sup>68</sup>.

### 2.3. Types of Reactions Depending on Comprehensiveness

- **One-dimensional.** Despite transnational commonalities, individual campaigns evolved around a **distinct national trigger**. In consequence, responses have also often **focused on a single core issue**. Taking the anti-gender campaign at face value, and treating it as one targeting precisely the concept of “gender”, the Polish Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment published on her website a glossary of terms connected to gender studies and equality policies. At the beginning of the anti-gender mobilization in France, progressives concentrated solely on addressing the issue of marriage equality. When the campaigners took up a new, broader issue, progressives followed suit.
- **Multifaceted.** There were several **academic reactions based on the acknowledgement that the „gender ideology“ campaign is not about opposition to „gender“ per se**, but uses this concept as a “symbolic glue” in order to oppose a much broader set of issues, and ultimately reach a bigger goal of challenging the values and policies underlying the European project. However, this type of reaction was mainly of theoretical background and as of yet has not been translated into practice.

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<sup>67</sup> A. Pető, *Gender equality as re-enchantment: Political mobilisation in the times of „neo-patriarchal neoliberalism“ and possibilities of bipartisan dialogue*, [In:] *Woman Up! 2*, (ed.) M. Pöim and J.Tánczos, FEPS – Fondation Jean Jaurès, Brussels, 2015, p. .139-145.

<sup>68</sup> „Re-strengthening Global Sisterhood: Emerging Women’s Issues for a New Global Agenda”, Oct 20-21 2011, event summary.



## 2.4. Types of Reactions Depending on Target Group

- **European Parliament.** Internal training documents produced for Members of the European Parliament prove that progressive actors in the EP, such as members of the S&D group, are aware of the existence of a coordinated conservative pressure when it comes to gender issues, and have been trying to train policy personnel and MEPs so that they can better understand the challenge and the actors involved. Likewise, FEPS has been aiming to involve MEPs in their gender-themed workshops in order to raise awareness about anti-genderism in the EP.
- **Country Executive and Administration.** This type of responses focused on **pressuring the executive or the legislative branch** to take a stand against the campaign and in favor of the protection of human rights. It included lobbying (e.g. for the Istanbul Convention by the Congress of Women in Poland or for a respectful parliamentary debate in France), disseminating NGO reports and expert papers among MPs, collecting signatures on petitions, as well as organizing demonstrations in front of government offices. The Slovakian Gender Equality Institute prepared an e-learning course about gender equality, which was targeted at state administration staff but was also made available to the general public<sup>69</sup>. In January 2014, members of the Polish *Democratic Left Alliance* held a conference dedicated to “gender ideology” which targeted Members of the Parliament.
- **Progressive Actors.** Reactions targeted at gender and LGBTQ+ experts and activists, as well as left wing and culturally liberal politicians included academic papers, working groups and conferences (e.g. *Habemus Gender* organized at *Université Libre de Bruxelles* in 2014<sup>70</sup>), as well as exchanges and strategic workshops of activists and representatives of the civic sector. Here the goal was to **learn from each other** and come up with common tactics for countering the campaign.

<sup>69</sup> See: Durinová, *ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>70</sup> See also the resulting volume: S. van der Dussen, V. Piette, D. Paternotte, “Habemus gender ! Déconstruction d’une riposte religieuse”, 2016, <http://www.editions-universite-bruxelles.be/fiche/view/2761>.

- **Public Opinion.** Actions targeting the public opinion predominately aimed at **providing the general public with accurate information.** These responses included the dissemination of relevant information about gender and LGBTQ+ issues through booklets, articles and commentaries published in the press, setting up websites and filming viral videos addressing the campaign (e.g. one produced by Transfuzja Foundation<sup>71</sup> in Poland), as well as engaging famous media personalities to generate wider support. In Slovenia, a popular rap singer Zlatko recorded a song about marriage equality. His video features prominent Slovenian personalities presenting sheets of paper with pro-equality slogans<sup>72 73</sup>. In some countries, public opinion polls showing wide support for same-sex marriage (France) or the Istanbul Convention (Poland) were used to convince the unconvinced, and underscore the fact that the **demands of conservative mobilizations did not reflect the views of the majority.** While appeals to public opinion have been among the most popular means of responding to anti-genderism, Kathleen Blee reminds us that “the relationship between majority public opinion and public policy is complicated and uneven” and so it might be “more productive for feminists to focus directly on strategies to weaken the organization of conservatives or interrupt their ability to mobilize constituents rather than appeal to public opinion as a way of undermining the power of the right”<sup>74</sup>.
- **Selected, targeted groups.** In some cases, communication was aimed at **specific groups who could influence the opinion of their communities** or professional associations. In reaction to the outbreak of the anti-gender campaign in French schools, the Minister of Education wrote a letter to school directors expressing support for gender-sensitive education and linking it to Republican ideas – moreover, the minister and other progressives did not hesitate to suggest that protesters constituted a threat to the Republic and to national values.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5Qc3HwMEwM>

<sup>72</sup> R. Kuhar and D. Paternotte, *Gender ideology. Mobilization of conservative groups against gender equality and sexual citizenship*, Brussels and Ljubljana, May 2015.

<sup>73</sup> See: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=okWQpY2\\_K-l](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=okWQpY2_K-l)

<sup>74</sup> K. Blee, *Bolstering Feminist Politics in a Time of Conservative Ascendancy*, *Queries* N°01 (7) / 2012, p. 114.

<sup>75</sup> V. Peillon, *Égalité filles-garçons : lettre du ministre de l'éducation nationale aux directeurs d'école et aux chefs d'établissement*, January 29, 2014, <http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid76751/egalite-filles-garcons-lettre-du-ministre-de-l-education-nationale.html>.

- **Participants of the Anti-Gender Campaign.** Quite another type of response was the one aimed at participants and supporters of the anti-gender campaign: the Vatican (e.g. “*Letter to the Pope from the Polish Congress of Women*”), national Church officials (e.g. “*Letter to the Bishops*” issued by the Polish Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment) and priests, conservative and pro-life activists and right wing politicians. Here the tactics varied from disputes to attempts at facilitating dialogue or even building alliances (see chapter 2.5.).

## 2.5. Types of Reactions Depending on Means

- **Monitoring and Exposure.** Some activists and journalists worked to uncover the **personal and financial connections of anti-gender campaigners with the Roman Catholic Church** and its satellite institutions, **as well as far right parties** and the business sector. For example in Croatia, *Citizens Vote Against* group exposed *On Behalf of the Family’s* connections with *Opus Dei*, right-wing party HRAST and the pharmaceutical lobby<sup>76</sup>.
- **Litigation.** Croatian activists also submitted a collective complaint to the European Committee of Social Rights against the Republic of Croatia in respect to the sexual education curriculum. In Poland, Feminoteka Foundation joined their forces with Vice-Marshall of Sejm Wanda Nowicka, and filed a complaint to the Supreme Audit Office, demanding the control of whether the Church and its institutions that were beneficiaries of EU grants complied with gender mainstreaming requirements. In France, *La Manif pour tous* links to the extreme right and to the Catholic Church have been publicized by the national media in an attempt to debunk the image of the movement as being independent, politically neutral and comprised solely of concerned citizens. At the EU level, in 2015 training materials were developed for MEPs presenting an overview of the actors engaged in the opposition to sexual and reproductive health and rights.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> R. Kuhar and D. Paternotte, *ibid.*, p. 6-7.

<sup>77</sup> Due to confidentiality of the materials, we are not able to reference them.

- **Ridiculing and Offensive Approach.** Another popular strategy employed in reaction to the campaign was **ridiculing the arguments** used by the anti-gender movement and the movement itself. One important platform has been the social media (Internet memes and Facebook profiles have been created which presented the supporters of the movement as backward, uneducated, or downright lunatic). In Poland, writer and activist Jaś Kapela promoted Political Critique’s 2014 guidebook on gender wearing a Darth Vader mask and a dress. Confrontational and offensive reactions were also predominant in media disputes, where progressive actors often engaged in targeting “gender ideology” campaigners. In France, Secretary of State Jean-Marie Le Guen sparked controversy by drawing a parallel between anti-gender protesters and Islamic fundamentalism<sup>78</sup>. While it was not common, on one occasion the attacks went even further than verbal aggression: activists from an LGBTQ+ NGO called *Act Up* attacked the workplace of a leader of the anti-gender movement by pouring fake blood on the walls of her office building<sup>79</sup>.
- **Research.** Academic research itself has been another type of reaction. The overview of current state of research has been presented in chapter 1.<sup>80</sup>
- **Informative/educational.** Reactions of this type predominantly saw the anti-gender campaign as resulting from **insufficient knowledge**, and shared the belief that anti-genderism can be curbed by providing and disseminating accurate information about gender and minority issues. These reactions included press articles written by renowned feminist academics who explained the objectives and methods of gender studies as an academic discipline<sup>81</sup>, as well as statements and

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<sup>78</sup> L., La Rochère, *Ludovine de La Rochère: «M. Le Guen, des millions de Français attendent vos excuses»*, [In:] *Le Figaro*, February 2, 2015, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/societe/2015/02/02/31003-20150202ARTFIG00279-ludovine-de-la-rochere-non-m-le-guen-lmpt-n-a-rien-a-voir-avec-l-islamisme.php>

<sup>79</sup> AFP, *Act Up verse du «faux sang» sur la facade de la fondation Lejeune*, [In:] *Libération*, August 4, 2013, [http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2013/08/04/act-up-verse-du-faux-sang-sur-la-facade-de-la-fondation-lejeune\\_922784](http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2013/08/04/act-up-verse-du-faux-sang-sur-la-facade-de-la-fondation-lejeune_922784).

<sup>80</sup> See also: S. Hark and P. Vila (ed.), *Anti-Genderismus Sexualität und Geschlecht als Schauplätze aktueller politischer Auseinandersetzungen*, transcript Verlag, 2015; S. van der Dussen, V. Piette, D. Paternotte, *ibidem*; R. Kuhar, D. Paternotte (eds.), *ibidem*.

<sup>81</sup> A multitude of such articles has been published in Poland, see e.g.: *Co to jest gender? [What is gender]*, interview with Barbara Limanowska, *Wysokie Obcasy*, 27.12.2013, [http://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/1,96856,15194525,Barbara\\_Limanowska\\_Co\\_to\\_jest\\_gender.html](http://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/1,96856,15194525,Barbara_Limanowska_Co_to_jest_gender.html).

manuals by NGO and government officials which defined the goals and key concepts of equality policies<sup>82</sup>.

- **Facilitating Dialogue and Building Alliances.** One promising strategy has been the facilitation of **dialogue** between representatives of different political circles and sides of the mobilization to create strategic alliances. In many countries, the countercampaign managed to gain support from professional associations and academic circles, which issued public statements defending gender studies as a legitimate academic field, e.g. statements by the German Sociological Association (DGS), the French Sociological Association, the French Political Science Association, as well as several open letters from Polish<sup>83</sup> and French scientists<sup>84</sup>. In Poland, the Dominican Order hosted a discussion between conservative and feminist women's circles. Analogous meetings have been organized by FES in Budapest. Also in Poland, some Catholic intellectuals, priests and platforms have openly opposed the campaign (e.g. Fr Alfred Wierzbicki who supported the Istanbul Convention in "*Gazeta Wyborcza*", or Catholic weekly "*Tygodnik Powszechny*" which lent its pages to feminist author Sławomira Walczewska).
- **Using policy-oriented discourse.** One tactic commonly used by left-wing and social democratic politicians was *trenching the fortress of policy provisions*<sup>85</sup>, that is, addressing anti-gender mobilizations by concentrating on defending specific policies that were under attack from conservatives. This reaction was especially popular among politicians, as it let them guide the debate back to the field where they feel more comfortable - policy-making instead of politics<sup>86</sup>.
- **Reclaiming and reframing key notions of conservative discourse.** The tactic of taking the opponent's key concepts and arguments and reframing them in order to be more inclusive, has been a **widely used method of LGBTQ+ activists for decades**. It has also been used during the gender debates, e.g. in Slovenia, where the slogan *family does matter* had been reappropriated

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<sup>82</sup> See e.g. the glossary of terms published on the website of the Polish Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment (p. 23) or the e-learning course prepared for administration staff in Slovakia (see p. 24).

<sup>83</sup> See: e.g. [http://www.znp.edu.pl/element/1919/List\\_naukowcow\\_zajmujacych\\_sie\\_gender;http://wyborcza.pl/1,95892,15248524,Nie\\_ma\\_innej\\_ideologii\\_gender\\_niz\\_ta\\_mowiaca\\_o.html](http://www.znp.edu.pl/element/1919/List_naukowcow_zajmujacych_sie_gender;http://wyborcza.pl/1,95892,15248524,Nie_ma_innej_ideologii_gender_niz_ta_mowiaca_o.html)

<sup>84</sup> L. Bereni, et al. , ibidem.

<sup>85</sup> Pető, *Anti-Gender...*, p. 128.

<sup>86</sup> See E.g. G. Brustier, ibid., p. 35.

to *all families matter* to suggest that families are more diverse than the conservative notion of “natural family” implies<sup>87</sup>. In France, President Hollande hijacked *La Manif pour tous* postulate to “listen to the people” by organizing hearings and a long parliamentary debate with the participation of all stakeholders in order to highlight the democratic nature of his politics.<sup>88</sup>

- **Using personal stories.** Social psychology suggests that people tend to like better the things they know, and public opinion polls show people are less homophobic if they know a gay person themselves<sup>89</sup>. **Using personal and emotion-laden narratives to support the progressive standpoint is a useful tactic** for feminist and LGBTQ+ activists, because it allows to illustrate abstract claims with personal stories of concrete people. During the recent mobilization, the tactic was used in France, Poland and Slovenia<sup>90</sup>.

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<sup>87</sup> R. Kuhar and D. Paternotte, *ibidem*.

<sup>88</sup> *Mariage gay : Hollande appelle au respect de la démocratie*, [In:] bfmtv.com, April 18, 2013, <http://www.bfmtv.com/politique/hollande-appelle-au-respect-de-la-democratie-sur-le-mariage-gay-370932.html>.

<sup>89</sup> Gallup, *Knowing Someone Gay/Lesbian Affects Views of Gay Issues*, May 29, 2009, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/118931/knowning-someone-gay-lesbian-affects-views-gay-issues.aspx>.

<sup>90</sup> R. Kuhar and D. Paternotte, *ibidem*.

### Chapter 3: Evaluation of progressive responses to the anti-gender mobilization

At this stage, **it is impossible to accurately assess the effects of the responses** based on any quantifiable measure. Statistical research has been scarce and often based on one-off public opinion surveys that cannot grasp the dynamics of the process. Academic literature, in turn, is more interested in the analysis of the anti-gender phenomenon than in progressive responses: up until now, the issue of progressive reactions and their normative or objective evaluation has not been taken up in a comprehensive manner<sup>91</sup>.

In this chapter, **we propose a normative evaluation of progressive responses** based on the three principles of progressive practices proposed by Catherine Eschle and Bice Maiguashca. As these feminist scholars argue, a progressive practice is not simply one that has a progressive goal. In order for a practice to be considered progressive, it needs to be **inclusive** (characterized by an open attitude towards others and an attempt at establishing connections), **reflexive** (characterized by a self-critical analysis of one's own actions, values and position) and **prefigured**, that is, involving careful scrutiny of whether the means employed reflect the kind of society one is striving for<sup>92</sup>.

Evaluating the responses in the light of Eschle's and Maiguashca's principles allows us to identify one model progressive response to the campaign, namely, **the attempt at establishing dialogue and building strategic alliances**. Instead of mobilizing people along identity lines and dividing them into two political camps (e.g. "modern" and "progressive" feminists/leftists vs. "backward" and "fundamentalist" Catholic conservatives), some actors chose to find allies from within the Church or the Catholic community. Research consistently draws attention to the fact that neither Christians nor the Catholic Church should be seen as a coherent and unified pressure group or lobby. Moreover, because the post-war human rights consensus is no longer in place, instead of simply defending certain contested human rights policies, progressives should strive to create a new consensus among secular and religious moderates to halt the attacks on women's and minority rights. By mobilizing support around certain issues (e.g. opposing violence against women) rather than around identities (e.g. feminist identity), we can **build**

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<sup>91</sup> Among the exceptions are R. Kuhar, D. Paternotte, *ibidem* and A. Graff, *Gender i polityka, ale ta prawdziwa*, [In:] Dziennik Opinii, December 19, 2013, <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/opinie/20131219/graff-gender-i-polityka-ale-ta-prawdziwa>.

<sup>92</sup> C. Eschle and B. Maiguashca, *ibid.*, p. 646-647.

**alliances with people who do not consider themselves feminists or progressives** but will support a narrow common goal anyway. Finding common ground with representatives of conservative and religious circles is possible and necessary, and can also be used as a tactic **to reveal the incoherence of the anti-gender movement itself** (in the preliminary phases of the mobilization) or as a tactic to neutralize the movement's arguments one by one (when the gender debate is already on its way).

Strengthening the already existing and futile identity divisions is counter-productive. Successful actors have tried to build strategic cooperation around concrete issues or events by framing the debate in more broad and inclusive terms (e.g. as tackling the issue of violence against women) and around widely acceptable slogans such as “women’s life and safety” or “justice to the victims”, rather than in identity-based terms. Strategies aimed at dialogue also have the advantage of being **more reflexive**, that is, allowing the actors to see their claims have implications in broader power relations, and forcing them to **critically reconsider** their goals. Finally, responses of this kind also have the merit of enabling close **scrutiny of the means** through which the countercampaign is carried out, and ensuring that they are not aggressive and hostile.

**Within this broader strategy of negotiating common understanding and building alliances based on mutual respect, two tactics seem particularly effective.** The first one involves using **emotion-laden, personal stories** to support the goals of progressive politics. As Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte observe in their 2015 report, the use of personal life narratives of same-sex couples raising children succeeded in *putting a human and tangible face to the debate both in France and Slovakia*, as well as convincing the public opinion that the deeply contested issues are not merely ideological battles but have practical consequences for *everyday people, who are just like them*<sup>93</sup>. Likewise in Poland, feminist circles often countered the ideological war around the Istanbul Convention by refuting abstract, ideological statements of anti-gender campaigners with concrete stories of women who fell victim to domestic violence, as well as specific examples of how their cases were mishandled by the police or the courts. As cognitive scientists such as George Lakoff remind us, much of human reasoning works through such cognitive structures as narratives and metaphors which are deeply intertwined with emotions. Therefore, rational messages based on scientific data and appealing to people’s reason are oftentimes

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<sup>93</sup> R. Kuhar and D. Paternotte, *ibid.* p. 5.



less effective than emotionally-laden language which appeals to people's subconscious cognitive structures.<sup>94</sup>

By the same token, another successful tactic seems to be the **redefinition of key concepts** used by the Catholic Conservative mobilizations in order to make them more inclusive. For example, progressives can present themselves as family-friendly, by broadening the definition of “family” to include “families of choice”, or by arguing that gender equality serves demographic growth<sup>95</sup>. Hijacking the discourse of the anti-gender movement is **an advisable reaction not only for activists, but also for political parties**. Anti-gender movements tend to come up with a coherent, multi-faceted ideological framework that can and should be broken up. The underlying goal of using parts of the conservative discourse (e.g. broadening (heterosexual) “family” to the social reality of “all families”) is reflexively showing **how exclusive the conservative discourse is**.

Assessing the reactions in the light of Eschle's and Maiguashca's principles also allows us to see the serious drawbacks of some commonly used responses. **One broad category of reactions which we have found not only ineffective but also potentially harmful in the long run is what we call the “besieged fortress syndrome”**. These reactions spring from the belief on the part of some progressive actors that they are falling victim to coordinated, orchestrated attacks which should be repelled by a powerful counterattack. As such, they mirror the “conspiracy theory” approach of the conservatives. Among the examples of this approach are: holding secret (closed) NGO meetings dedicated to uncovering anti-gender mobilization, aggressive investigation-like exposure of anti-gender actors and their personal connections that goes beyond the methods of classical investigative journalism, verbal or (so far rare) physical attacks on anti-gender campaigners, as well as educating people about gender studies and gender equality from the position of the enlightened few. These tactics, even if solidly grounded in data and academic research, employ means which usually fall out of the scope of transparent and inclusive tactics. They also **hinder long-term dialogue and escalate the conflict** by polarizing the adversaries and

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<sup>94</sup> See for example: G. Lakoff, *Don't Think of an Elephant!: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate--The Essential Guide for Progressives*, Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004.

<sup>95</sup> In Poland, the slogan that equality increases fertility rates was successfully promoted in the media as a key finding of the report by the Institute of Public Affairs. M. Sobociński, *Polityka Rodzinna w Polsce. W stronę zrównoważonego modelu*, ISP 2015, <http://www.isp.org.pl/publikacje,25,834.html>.

strengthening the anti-colonial rhetoric of the eight which promotes the image of progressive NGOs as foreign-funded implants which secretly force foreign agenda on national law.

**Nevertheless, we do recognize that some of the aforementioned tactics, when used self-critically and well-suited for a particular target group, are undoubtedly useful and necessary:** e.g. closed strategic meetings enable cooperation in a friendly and secure environment, and exposure of the active role of the Church in the mobilizations helps refute the claims that the movement is an independent mobilization of “concerned citizens”. Also, both research and activists' daily experiences suggest that the Vatican indeed plays a crucial role in the current gender debates<sup>96</sup>, and some kind of ideological and practical cooperation exists between national movements (e.g. in case of the appearance of certain visual elements created by the French movement in Italy, Germany or Ireland). By the same token, while we are critical of “enlightened” responses to anti-genderism (stemming from the belief that anti-genderism can be stopped by simply teaching people about the “facts” of gender studies) and more in favor of “reenchanting” people with progressive values<sup>97</sup>, we do acknowledge the role trainings aimed at specific groups (e.g. teachers) can play in the process of building a more just society, as well as the general importance of equality education.

The framework proposed by Eschle and Maiguashca is a normative framework that lets us critically assess the relationship between political means and goals, and **we believe that this self-critical approach should indeed be part of progressive politics** – at least on a theoretical level. On the other hand, in an environment where opponents do not use a framework embedded in progressive ethics and do politics according to a traditional, more Machiavellian and Schmittian (conflict-based) understanding of the political process, **progressive goals can sometimes only be reached by means that would not be considered as progressive by Eschle's and Maiguascha's typology.**

This is an old dilemma. For instance, when a progressive organization's transparent functioning and financing is attacked as “traitorous” by conservative actors who are not transparent themselves, it is difficult to draw attention to the double measure without turning to exposure tactics. Similarly, as

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<sup>96</sup> See e.g. D. E. Buss, *Robes, Relics and Rights: the Vatican and the Beijing Conference on Women*, [In:] *Social & Legal Studies*, Sage Publications, Vol. 7(3), p. 339-363., D. E. Buss, *Finding the Homosexual in Women's Rights. The Christian Right in International Politics*, [In:] *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, June 2004, p. 257-284.

<sup>97</sup> See A. Petó, *Gender equality as re-enchantment...*

Roman Kuha<sup>98</sup> and Romain Carna<sup>99</sup> pointed out, the secularization of religious discourse is an important tactic on behalf of conservatives, and in an environment of conservative fear of Islamic terrorism, it might make sense to expose the alliances of conservatives with fundamentalist Muslim regimes and groups. **Progressive politics has no Sorcerer's Stone**: political practice and progressive values should be in a constant, reciprocal and self-critical dialogue with each other. Eschle and Maiguascha themselves recognize that **political practice and normative political theory are sometimes at odds with each other**<sup>100</sup>.

Thus, even a normative analysis cannot propose that progressives should *a priori* exclude tools from their repertoire, however, it does suggest that progressives **should always reflect on their practices in a self-critical manner, and should be generally aware of the ethical issues stemming from the tension between their values and political practice**. Ultimately, politics is about power and empowerment, even for values-oriented progressives. This means that progressives can only receive the mandate and the authority to make change if they are able to play the rules of the game in an intelligent manner. They should strive to act as ethically as possible and continually match, collide and compare the rules of traditional politics and of their progressive ideals.

Having reflected on the responses used by progressives to counter anti-gender mobilizations, as a means of summary we would like to return to the question posed in the title of our paper, namely - **how well have progressives handled the war on “gender”**, as well as cultural wars in general? Certain tactical mistakes have been identified and described above, such as the tendency to overtly rely on rational, educational reactions instead of those appealing to people’s emotions, or to further polarize the conflict without attempting to enter into dialogue with moderate conservatives. Here we would like to reflect on one major strategic mistake on the part of progressives, namely, their **narrow understanding of anti-genderism**. By this we refer to the tendency to think of anti-gender mobilizations as solely a feminist/LGBT issue, a religious issue, or a matter of a particular contested policy, instead of

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<sup>98</sup> R. Kuhar, *Playing with science: Sexual citizenship and the Roman Catholic Church counter-narratives in Slovenia and Croatia*, [In:] Women's Studies International Forum, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2014.07.005>.

<sup>99</sup> R. Carnac, “L’Église catholique contre « la théorie du genre » : construction d’un objet polémique dans le débat public français contemporain”, *Synergies Italie*, n°10 - 2014 p. 125-143.

<sup>100</sup> C. Eschle and B. Maiguascha, *ibid.* p. 647.

acknowledging that it is all of these at once, and more - a symptom of a much bigger problem with European democracy.

So what IS this problem? We argue that **anti-genderism should be considered as part of a broader fundamentalist surge**. As such, it is at the same time a symptom of a wider political crisis in Europe, and a means of building a broad, right-wing coalition capable of redefining the European system around traditionalist and religious values. Research and investigative journalism have so far provided conclusive evidence that the rise of anti-genderism and the activity of right-wing parties and CSOs are intimately linked together.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, we believe that many progressives, in good faith, have been asking the wrong question. They wanted to know **how to defeat anti-gender movements**, when in fact what they should be asking is: **how to address the root causes of the rise of political fundamentalism** across Europe?

As numerous analyses have shown,<sup>102</sup> following the market revolution of the 1980s (and the subsequent neoliberal transition in CEE countries) and the resulting increase of social inequalities, the right has managed to successfully mobilize the frustration and anger of those who have fallen victim to the erosion of basic social and economic rights. These very real fears about one's security have been rearticulated by the populist right in terms of an identity conflict between "real patriots" and the "morally corrupt", the glorious nation under attack and its traitors. Political fundamentalism thus often mobilizes the underprivileged as well as low/middle income voters who consider themselves part of the silent, moral majority that is under attack to vote according to "values" instead of their social and economic interests. In his analysis of the conservative surge in the U.S., Geoffrey Nunberg<sup>103</sup> explains how conservatives hid existing class differences and interests behind cultural issues like gay marriage and "family values" (the latter meaning the ruthless exclusion and discrimination of families that do not fit the conservative framework). According to Nunberg, by defining and stigmatizing both leftism and

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<sup>101</sup> See for instance: *Gender as symbolic glue...*

<sup>102</sup> E.g. I. Krastev, "Democracy in the Age of Populism, or the Self-Enmity of Democracy", [In:] *Diplomaatia*, No. 94/95, June 2011; D. Ost, *Defeat of Solidarity: Anger and Politics in Postcommunist Europe*, Cornell University Press, 2007.

<sup>103</sup> G. Nunberg, *Talking Right: How Conservatives Turned Liberalism into a Tax-Raising, Latte-Drinking, Sushi-Eating, Volvo-Driving, New York Times-Reading, Body-Piercing, Hollywood-Loving, Left-Wing Freak Show*, PublicAffairs, 2006.

liberalism as a lifestyle choice of the upper middle class, Hollywood and even academia, conservatives managed to mobilize the support of the working class voter.

However, populist right-wing parties and movements address not just the “losers” but also some of the “winners” of socio-economic changes. The latter support the right because they are interested in introducing “law and order” as well as maintaining the status quo that is beneficial for them. Thus, the reason behind the success of extreme right-wing fundamentalism is that it manages to create a political alliance between different actors, among them the “winners” and the “losers” of a transition or a crisis period.<sup>104</sup> By the same token, it can be argued that the radical left has been unable to surge like the extreme right because it has so far been unsuccessful in producing a long-lasting alliance between “winners” and “losers”.

How can progressives challenge right-wing hegemony and lead the debate back to the place where they can dominate it? How can they direct the attention of the lower and middle classes back to their socio-economic interests instead of identity conflicts and cultural wars such as the one against “gender ideology”<sup>105</sup>? Here the task of progressives is twofold: firstly, they have to **stand up for the weaker parts of society** and make sure that the reforms they are advocating serve all and not just those who are already better off; and secondly, they need to **convince voters that social democratic policies are more profitable for society as a whole** than those proposed by the populist right or market fundamentalists. In fact, as Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson argue in their widely-discussed book,<sup>106</sup> there is a significant correlation between income inequality on the one hand, and various health and social problems on the other. More equal societies generally create better conditions for their citizens, and are thus less susceptible to various social problems and disruptions. The same is true at the European level. The lack of a common EU social model and social solidarity on the European level is closely intertwined

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<sup>104</sup> See. e.g. A. Tóth and I. Grajczár, “Miért olyan sikeresek a radikális nemzeti-populista pártok nagy társadalmi-gazdasági átalakulások, válságok idején?”, *Politikatudományi Szemle*, 2009/3, p. 7-29.

<sup>105</sup> Here the task is even more difficult in post-communist countries, where the overwhelming majority of voters nurse left-wing economic attitudes, which makes it hard for a party to carve out a distinct niche based on economic views. Thus, even for left-wing parties, rational party competition is often centered around cultural issues and values. Meanwhile, right-wing parties often combine in their discourse left-wing economic values with traditionalist views on gender roles and minority issues.

<sup>106</sup> K. Pickett and R. Wilkinson, *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*, Penguin, 2010.

with the rise of right-wing fundamentalism which opposes the EU as a neoliberal project serving the elites.

## Recommendations

- **Treat anti-genderism as a challenge to liberal democracy.** New conservative mobilizations such as the one against “gender” constitute a major political challenge that cannot be solved by treating them as solely a feminist or LGBT issue. While at face value these movements attack such issues as gender equality, LGBT+ rights, sexual education or reproductive rights, on a deeper level they just use these issues as a “symbolic glue” to unite various conservative actors in their quest to challenge liberal democracy and impose nationalist and religious values in Europe. This is precisely why all progressives and not just feminists or LGBT activists should care about these movements.
- **Be proactive - address the root causes of anti-genderism.** In order not to become a reactionary movement, progressives should mobilize people around a positive program, instead of simply responding to what conservatives do and defending particular policies from their attacks. On a deeper level, anti-genderism stems from economic insecurity, rising inequalities and other challenges created by decades of neoliberal policies. Social democrats should address these very fears and challenges and rearticulate them in terms of conflicts of interests and distribution of wealth and not in terms of identity conflicts and cultural wars. To restore people’s trust in liberal democracy, they should design policies which bring equality to everyone and not just the privileged.
- **Switch to less technical and more affective language.** Progressive language should be more emotional and connected to the lives and experiences of ordinary people instead of one that is based on technocratic statements about implementing policies or adhering to international agreements. For instance, in the case of same-sex marriages, mobilizing adult children of same-sex couples to talk about their childhood proved very effective.
  - **Use and reframe key concepts and slogans of right wing mobilizations:** family, patriotism, wellbeing of children etc. and reinterpret them in progressive terms (e.g. by arguing that equality serves families and demographic growth).
  - **Reclaim the notion of gender** from conservative actors. If reclaiming “gender” is impossible in the short term, **use other, less contentious terms** that have the same

meaning but will not be automatically rejected by the public. It is harder for people to be against women's rights than to oppose the vague notion of „gender ideology“.

- **Recommendations about effective communication should be propagated** consciously **through workshops and trainings among progressive actors**, most importantly those who appear in the media and social media.
- **Bring about change by creating broad and strategic alliances.** Because in so many places around Europe social democrats do not currently have the majority to put their vision of society into practice, they should realize that they can bring about change in other ways as well. Progressives should reach out to moderate religious and conservative circles to establish dialogue and initiate joint action against religious fundamentalism and political extremism. Aligning with moderate conservatives can not only reveal the hidden divisions within the right wing front, but also facilitate the creation of a new consensus. This means that political parties should favor long term strategic goals (e.g. cooperation with progressive representatives of the Church) over short-term tactical gains (e.g. gaining electoral support by antagonizing the Church). To gain more allies, it is advisable to mobilize support around specific issues such as ending domestic violence.
- **Create a platform for cooperation between progressive actors on all levels.** Progressive NGOs, grassroots movements, journalists and academics have been actively engaged in the recent battles around “gender”. However, the task ahead is to encourage progressive parties (both national and EU-level) to follow suit and to draw from the experience of these actors to make sure the right issues are put on the table.
  - As part of this cooperation, the **incoherence between progressive values declared by the S&D group** on the European level, **and the electoral tactics employed by their member parties on the national level should be addressed.** Sadly, not all member parties are equally dedicated to protecting human and minority rights in their countries, and some of them prioritize electoral results over progressive values. Because they understand the internal divisions between left-wing parties, the S&D group and the Party of European Socialists should play a crucial role in this process, educating their members about the importance progressive values.



- After reviewing existing literature, we also suggest that further **practical research useful for progressive parties' strategic planning** should be encouraged and financed:
  - Statistical research **exploring the “symbolic glue” angle among EU28** (statistical correlations between anti-gender mobilizations, electoral behavior and values related to Europe, globalization, liberal economy, human rights etc.). This should enable political actors and parties to better understand the way gender relates to fundamentalism and various cleaving issues in voters' minds.
  - Creating a **tentative typology of anti-gender mobilizations based on phase** in order to see what kind of progressive reactions work in different phases of the campaign.
  - **Focus group interviews testing various tactical responses in different political cultures and systems.**
  - **Exploring progressive reactions to Christian right in the United States** and establishing a transatlantic academic and political dialogue around the issue of “gender ideology” and new conservative movements. When doing so, European progressives should build on existing networks, e.g. the Women Up! network of FEPS.

## Literature

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