
NEO-CONSERVATIVE THREATS TO SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH & RIGHTS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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SUMMARY:

This report focuses on the neo-conservative groups and their political agenda of opposing the laws and policies concerning sexual and reproductive health and rights in the European Union. In the last few years, the member states have witnessed a rise of some new, seemingly grassroots movements. Those movements, often heavily relying on religious beliefs, are trying to entice citizens to actively participate in ultra-conservative politics regarding issues dealing with family, gender equality, sexuality and reproductive health. The neo-conservative political agenda has been establishing itself as a struggle to defend and protect “endangered” values of “life, family and religious freedom”, and a term its proponents love to use as the ultimate argument is “gender ideology”. This pseudo-scientific term is used as a political tool to curtail further development of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

All those movements are actually political initiatives that manipulate religious discourse and increasingly utilize public and political space, as well as instruments, to achieve their goals. Those neo-conservative groups, including Vatican, have therefore transformed their strategies, initially consisting mostly of silent prayers, and are now trying to impose sexual and reproductive health choices as the center stage political debate. One of the newest features they have adopted into their activity style is a skillful manipulation with citizen participation in public and political life through the civil initiative channels, online media, petition platforms and social networking. These seemingly grassroots initiatives and citizen drafts that tactically use institutionalized power of religious hierarchies, and are often focused on youth population, work as a sort of pressure from the base.

The connection between neo-conservative groups in Europe and their like-minded counterparts in The United States of America is visible in their common political agenda, with American side acting as a “mentor” who shares experiences and active strategies. Their financial links are, however, often hidden.

Good networking and organization, increasingly professional approach, and prevailing lack of transparency in their financial background – all of it are often highlighted as main features of neo-conservative groups. Another one of their recognizable features are blurred lines between secular agents (civil initiatives, civil society organizations and political parties) and religious hierarchies. The significant influence they have started to achieve is disproportional to their real power in (small) numbers, and it is a result of a skillful use of modern communication and IT methods, as well as the civil and political instruments. They also heavily rely on manipulation and misinformation methods.

We analyze their direct political influences through the examples of the organized advocacy actions against accepting the Estrela, Lunacek and Zuber reports in the European Parliament, as well as through the example of European civil initiative called “One of Us”. It is obvious that the neo-conservative agents achieve more influence than their support in numbers would imply, and that the whole movement is based on a small, marginal, but very well organized and financed group of advocates for a fundamentalist religious and political agenda. It is also obvious that the final goal of the neo-conservative efforts is gaining political power and including catholic religious values in public policy and legislature, which in itself is an attack on a democratic concept of a secular state.

The final part of the report lists some guidelines for future advocacy actions and strategic confrontations that would limit the influence of neo-conservative interest groups regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights in the European Union. The guidelines have been grouped in three areas: Monitoring, informing and documenting; Reclaiming values and terminology in advocacy, and Networking and building alliances.



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INTRODUCTION

We have chosen two works to illustrate the range and content of this report. Written ten years apart from each other, those two papers are also a good starting point for this one. The first paper, “Preserving Power and Privilege: The Vatican’s Agenda in the European Union” was published in 2003 by an organization then called Catholics for a Free Choice, and is today Catholics for Choice. The second document, “Support by 80 Human Rights Organizations for the Croatian Constitutional Referendum”, has been sent to the Croatian representatives in the European Parliament by organization called European Dignity Watch.

In a foreword to the first paper we have mentioned, there is a sentence that hints a following development: “without a doubt, Europe and the European Union are the next goal for Vatican advocates and their conservative catholic allies fighting against family planning policies” (Catholics for a Free Choice, 2003). Ten years later – or now – that hint is a reality. It is embodied in new, seemingly grassroots movements across the countries in the European Union (EU), and those movements, often relying on religious beliefs, draft the citizens for active participation in ultra-conservative agendas regarding family, gender equality, sexuality and reproductive health. The introduction to the 2003 report claims that the main threatening element to the institutional church’s positions on those issues is the European consensus on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), confirmed by the EU’s lead when SRHR were defined as individual human rights during key United Nations conferences held in 1994 in Cairo (International Conference on Population and Development) and 1995 in Beijing (Fourth World Conference on Women). Since all the European countries have adopted the principles and action plans from those conferences, Vatican has taken new steps in re-affirming and legitimizing its ruined social and cultural authority.

The second document that we have been mentioning, published ten years after the first one, points to some discourses and action strategies used by the new generation of European initiatives opposing the full implementation of SRHR, and whose link to the Vatican has yet to be explored in more detail. A referendum covered in the document was set up by the local neo-conservative initiative called “In the Name of the Family”, which, using democratic means of civil referendum, managed to include a discriminatory characterization of marriage into the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia. Also, the mere fact that the document has been sent from the office which is only 500 meters away from the European Parliament, and that it has been sent by the organization that highlights informing, advocacy and networking in its logo – reveals some features of the strategic positioning, as well as the operative and influencing mode of neo-conservative groups¹. Furthermore, the vocabulary used in text is rich in information regarding the discourse of their reasoning and action, so it reveals that the eighty signing organizations that claim to be “human rights organizations” advocate the “natural order” of heterosexual marriage and family, that they deal in misinformation when stating that “the topic of the referendum has a firm standing in the international law”, and there is also an explicit congratulations to the Croatian citizens for “...public engagement and active participation in democracy”.

This Croatian example is only one of some dozen in Europe, most of which have emerged in last few years as ideologically interlinked, local manifestations of trans-national mobilization against

¹ European Dignity Watch has also publicly supported three Croatian representatives that were elected into the European Parliament in 2014.

SRHR. Since each EU member state is to adopt and implement its own legislation regarding SRHR, the objectives and strategies of each neo-conservative group is also different depending on the national agenda. Therefore, they are focused on activities against marriage equality (Slovenia, France, Croatia, Slovakia), against abortion availability (Spain, Lithuania), and against school educational programs about sexuality and gender equality (Croatia, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Poland, Lithuania). Their common link, however, is more or less visible presence of the Catholic church, which supports them ideologically, but also in operations, political mobilization and financing.

At the same time, neo-conservative groups use online platforms and social networking to coordinate and conduct initiatives against policies advocating implementation of SRHR on the EU level. That kind of work was particularly visible in strong campaigns organized against adopting several reports that have promoted gender equality and SRHR (Estrela, Lunacek, Zuber), as well as in starting a civil initiative called “One of Us”, which aimed to ban EU’s legal and political help, as well as financing the program of policies in reproductive health care and abortion availability in developing countries.

In the title for this text, we use a term “neo-conservative threats” to highlight those political agendas that oppose the implementation of SRHR, and which are conducted by a wide variety of social agents, including religious institutions, civil society organizations, citizen initiatives and political parties. Although many of these groups are often referred to as “religious right” and “religious conservative”, we wanted to emphasize the political aspect of those movements, which manipulate the religious discourse, and display a growing tendency to use public and political arena, as well as instruments to achieve their goals. Also, in their efforts to impose the “one and only Truth” to the plurality of the contemporary world, those neo-conservative agendas share some common features with fundamentalist movements. We are aware that the term “neo-conservatism” has been used in the history of political movements to describe specific ideological platforms, especially ones that are active in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. In this text, however, we use “neo-conservatism” to denote restoration of the traditional options of the political right, who are focused on advocating fundamental catholic agenda to oppose SRHR, backed by contemporary political and technological tools.

In this paper, we explore neo-conservative groups and their political agenda of opposing laws and policies in the EU that deal with SRHR, and we do it by mapping and analyzing most prominent agents, their ideologies and values, as well as political strategies, activities and influences. Following the introduction, we discuss three main ideological categories that motivate neo-conservative activities: family, life and religious freedoms. In the central part, we present the key persons, organizations, online platforms and initiatives, also analyzing their activities and advocacy strategies in the public and political arena. We also take note on their networking through their links to political parties and religious institutions, just as through their connections with the United States of America. Furthermore, we provide an overview of their influencing campaigns through examples of their organized initiatives and advocacy activities. We finish the report with the conclusions, but also with the guidelines for strategic opposition and future advocacies that would limit the influence of neo-conservative interest groups regarding SRHR in the EU.

This report is the result of work by Center for Education, Counselling and Research – CESI team, and it is a part of the “#InTheNameOfLove” project, conducted in cooperation with Zagreb

Pride Association and with financial support by Open Society Foundations. The presented findings came from the analysis of existing relevant documents, media releases and data gathered from consulted stakeholders in the period from March to July 2014. Data gathering methods included individual semi-structured interviews over Skype, and written contributions and statements. The list of consulted stakeholders can be found at the end of the report.

I IDEOLOGY

In this part of our paper, we discuss ideology that is a motivational force of neo-conservative agenda and its obstruction of international recognition for SRHR, as well as the achievements in the field of gender equality and anti-discriminatory legislation.

Neo-conservative agents articulate their ideological reasoning through re-defining so called “traditional/moral/family values” that have been seemingly threatened by the processes of liberalization, secularization and moral decadence. They name feminists and “international gay lobby” as main culprits for such a situation, also mentioning elite, ruling political classes, which transform feminist and homosexual demands into public policy and laws (International Parents Forum, 2013). With social and political environment defined as such, neo-conservative political agenda is established as a struggle to defend and protect the threatened value categories of “life” (from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death), “family” (exclusively heterosexual, with a man/father as a dominant member), and “religious freedoms” (including the right to conscientious objection) (Datta, 2013).

Thus established ideological determinants of key values are in complete agreement with the Catholic church doctrine on the same issues. Additional power surge in activating public and political action for “saving” family, life and religious freedoms came from two texts, written some ten years ago by then cardinal and later the Head of the Catholic church, Joseph Ratzinger. In those two papers, he defines, directs and demands active participation of catholic believers (including politicians) in public and political life, as well as their undivided support to the church doctrine regarding family and SRHR (Ratzinger 2002; Ratzinger, 2003).

The category of “life” holds a firm central position in catholic ideological hierarchy, and the right to “life from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death” is heavily used as an argument in advocacy against abortion/euthanasia. Further development of this belief system brings forth a statement that life is carried on and maintained through marriage between a man and a woman, which is the foundation of the “natural” heterosexual family headed by a father, which is crucial for socializing children in accordance with “family values”. Within that frame of defining heterosexual family as “natural”, the term “marriage” is exclusively linked to opposite-sex, “complementary” couples, while all the other unions and relationships are considered less worthy, and are marginalized and discriminated against. This is true both socially and in legislation.

One of the arguments that are widely used to strategically provoke feelings of vulnerability, fear and finally hate towards anything perceived as an “attack” on the “natural” heterosexual family is a pseudo-scientific invention of the term “gender ideology”. The concept has been created by the Catholic church some twenty years ago, after the international recognition of SRHR in Cairo in 1994 and a year later in Beijing. It has been invented as an analytical and political tool to stop further development and exercise of sexual and reproductive health choices (Paternotte, 2014). For its creators, the term “gender ideology” means all the achievements by feminist, LGBTI and human rights movements, as well as the corpus of academic knowledge that deconstructs mainly biologically based presumptions on sex, gender and sexuality. As further explained, “gender ideology”, with its negation of the binary and complementary character of sex and gender, is a threat to the “natural” heterosexual family, and, by extension, the whole of humanity. It has infested many

international institutions (especially United Nations and EU) and has greatly influenced passing laws and public policy regarding sex, gender, sexuality, family and reproduction.

This strategic attempt by Catholic church to redefine cultural and political debate regarding said issues has caught on only recently in Europe, appearing in public and political discourse almost simultaneously with neo-conservative organizing and mobilization attempts in last few years². This concept also has a manifest capability to hide its true nature of political tool, and to impose itself as a socially valid term, which in itself holds a potential to reshape the public and political discourse³. "Gender ideology" has been operationalized as a cunning plan that extracts many "fears" caused by accepting same-sex and transgender families and practices, comprehensive sexual education in schools, and promoting principles of gender equality. All those are claimed to be a result of imposed equality and de-naturalization. "Gender ideology" does not require additional explanations, for it essentially works as a threat: "Gender ideology preys on your children!" However, the concept of "gender ideology" has lately been criticized even from the theological circles; the hollow, selective and unscientific nature of reasoning logic has also been pointed out, as well as the insufficient explanation and terminology manipulations used by Catholic church and its allies (Marschütz, 2014).

"Religious freedoms" is the basic concept used here to try and provide some legitimacy for discrimination and intolerance towards anything other and different, i.e. towards anything that does not fit within their narrow definitions of life and family. The concept itself means a right to think, speak and act based on your religious beliefs, which also includes "following Christian conscience even in professional life, without any fear of punishment or losing employment" (Kiska, 2011). Just as with "life" and "family", "religious freedoms" are considered endangered by the developments in anti-discrimination legislation (especially by laws regulating hate speech), and by sexual education curriculums in schools, perceived to be "dangerous" because they take away parents' rights to teach their children about sexuality according to their own religious values. Furthermore, the concept of "religious freedom" is often abused for conscientious objection when providing a pregnancy termination as a medical service, providing contraceptives and registering same-sex marriages/partnerships⁴. In these cases, the "religious freedom" is presented as an absolute, with a presumption that it replaces all the other social and legal norms.

² For the analysis of change in reasoning discourse by Catholic church and its civil initiative affiliates in recent public debates on the Family Law in Slovenia, and the sexual education curriculum in Croatia, see Kuhar (2014).

³ Recent public statements by a government representative and a representative of academic community clearly illustrate the way it has been happening in the Republic of Croatia. This is how the Minister of Science, Education and Sports explains his reasons to consult heads of Catholic church about the sexual education: "Church supports children learning about those issues, but they find it, for example, unacceptable to impose gender ideology" (Cvrtila, 2014). A professor at the Faculty of Political Sciences in Zagreb, on the other hand, has used these words to explain high approval ratings received by the president of a new political party: "... she has a very distinct gender ideology, which attracts many urban and educated women, as well as various minority groups within a society" (Špoljar, 2014).

⁴ In 2013, the European Court of Human Rights has dismissed the complaint placed by a UK registrar, who had been fired for not performing her duties in registering same-sex partnerships. Lillian Ladele placed a complaint, stating that she had been discriminated against because of her "Christian beliefs about marriage" (The Christian Institute, 2013).

There is an Austrian organization that deals with “worldwide phenomenon of intolerance against Christians - by calling attention to the more subtle forms occurring in Europe”, and it is called Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians. Their⁵ report on intolerance against Christians in Europe 2013 combines all the cases of desecrating churches and cemeteries with the cases of limiting conscientious objection and freedom of speech, as well as with the cases of limiting parental rights with sexual education in schools (Kugler, 2014). That and similar other reports are used in ideological arguments that equate minor European incidents with the examples of real violence against Christian communities in Middle East and Africa⁶, underlining their point by linking them to the perceived European cases of discrimination, in which they include limiting conscientious objection, anti-discriminatory legislation, and/or sexual education curriculums in schools. By connecting real violence and marginal cases, this dangerous rhetoric is without a doubt extending the meaning of “religious freedom”.

⁵ Several consulted persons have noted that this organization includes the efforts of only one or two people.

⁶ This argument has been used in 2013 by former Italian representative in the European Parliament, Luca Volontè, in his report to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, titled “Violence against Religious Communities”, and with the objective to advocate special rights for Christians, and impose catholic faith in the name of “religious freedom”. The attempt was stopped with the resolution titled “Preserving Human Rights with Regard to the Religion and Beliefs, and Protecting Religious Communities against Violence”.

I ACTING STRATEGIES

When working on this report, we have accepted a suggestion made by international activists for women's rights, which points out that the rise of religious fundamentalism should be analyzed not only as a counter-strike on the global recognition and affirmation of women's, as well as sexual and reproductive health rights in the last two decades. It should also be analyzed as a proactive force with its own dynamics and political vision for recreating a social order (Balchin, 2011). We should also never forget the fact that the Catholic church is an institution that is more than two thousand years old, and that its "strategic plans" span several decades into the future. In the EU, pro-active nature of Catholic church's and its secular, "citizens" allies' fundamentalist agenda regarding SRHR has lately been reflected in intensive and innovative (ab)use of contemporary social and political movements and instruments. They often shape their demands as citizen petitions and/or "pre-election pledges", and they include them into existing power networks and structures, like online media and political parties.

Strategies of the neo-conservative groups, including Vatican, have been transformed. They don't just pray silently anymore – they attempt to place sexual and reproductive health choices onto the center stage of public and political debates. Among their newest featured activities is a skillful manipulation with the concept and the practice of citizen participation in public and political life through the civil initiative channels, online media, petition platforms and social networking. These seemingly grassroots initiatives and citizen drafts that tactically use institutionalized power of religious hierarchies, and are often focused on youth population, work as a sort of pressure from the base. Neo-conservatives' favorite public arena, the one they target the most, is the education system, with all its potential to normalize values for future generations. One of their frequently used strategies in influencing education policies is re-shaping and masking fundamentalist visions into grassroots demands placed through the parents' associations' platform and shaped through the abuse of the children's and parents' rights concept.

Besides entering the public space, pressure to limit SRHR has also grown stronger in the political arena. According to several consulted persons, it all goes like this – first, the attention is drawn to certain specific issues through twitter. Then, the ideas are shaped in texts published on ultra-conservative catholic blogs. Finally, those ideas are put into form of political demands, placed by organizations like European Dignity Watch, as it was the case with organized pressures to dismiss Estrela, Lunacek and Zuber reports, achieved through intensive online advocacy and petitions. Their use of online social networking has lately evolved, resulting in significantly wider range of message dissemination, but also in better networking and connections between various agents and organizations.

Catholic hierarchy and its civil associates have lately been using a combination of multiple strategies to assure systemic spread and power consolidation in attempts to directly influence European policies regarding SRHR. Generally speaking, those groups have become very well organized and coordinated, with visible channels to exchange knowledge, strategies and messages among themselves. The latter has become obvious in increasingly similar promotional material across the EU. They are politically flexible and they adapt modern civil society organizations advocacy techniques, and they heavily use current events and contexts in their campaigns, manu-

facturing moral panic regarding issues that rise as relevant in certain local contexts. They have also become increasingly professional and louder in legal and political lobbying, which gives them opportunity to gain specific knowledge on politics and laws and call on the minority protection discourse, as well as the procedural formalities.⁷

Another specific of the neo-conservative agents' advocacy is focus on certain messages, messages that are articulated simply and as absolutes, often using general principles of family values that are attractive to most people, but which are then adjusted to the agenda against SRHR. Their media releases are composed in such manner that they offer promises of better future or/and revoke feelings of (family) belonging on one side, but they simultaneously provoke feelings of fear and/or hate towards the Other. While they have started to adopt important concepts as democracy and human rights into their reasoning discourse, they also have an exceptionally selective approach to the international system of human rights. Thus, they promote and prioritize rights to culture and religion ("religious freedom"), but also assume culturally relative position and reject the concept of universal and undivided character of human rights. Besides already mentioned, pseudo-scientific argument of "gender ideology", in promoting their religious ideals, they use a cultural argument that positions Europe and the EU as a Christian territory⁸, with a clear tendency to establish dominance of Christianity, which is often operationalized as islamophobia. However, along those "more developed" concepts, they don't shy away from brash misinformation in lobbying, insisting, for example, on a lie that advocating rights to reproductive health choices means promoting forced abortions.

Another feature of neo-conservative gatherings is a lack of transparency, which means that many key agents work disguised as representatives of various organizations of civil society, foundations, business entities and/or charities. Moreover, those types of organizations often take names that are misleading and cover up real objectives and background, strategically not profiling it as catholic. On the other hand, many names of such groups tend to represent them as speaking "in the name of everyone", or representing opinions of "moral majority". Good examples for that are Croatian initiative "In the Name of the Family" ("U ime obitelji") and French movement "Protest for Everyone" ("La Manif Pour Tous"). However, given the obvious success in mobilizing citizens for the neo-conservative agenda that opposes SRHR, the main difference between persons advocating anti-choice and pro-choice sexual and reproductive health policies is without a doubt a level of persistence and goal-orientation, i.e. a certain kind of obsession. While we might think that the legal exercise of marriage equality and providing legally available abortion is the end of our justified effort, the other side never stops with its "crusade".

⁷ This is what happened in the Republic of Croatia in 2013. After the intense pressure that neo-conservative groups created regarding the sexual education school curriculum, the Constitutional Court has stopped the implementation of the curriculum, citing procedural errors in its passing as a reason (Hodžić, 2013).

⁸ It seems useful to remember here that seven EU member states with catholic majority have placed a demand to include "Christian roots of Europe" into the EU Constitution draft in 2004.

I AGENTS

There is a paradigmatic example of using contemporary communication and IT tools in advocating fundamental political objectives, and that example is an online petition platform started in 2013, called CitizenGO. Described as “Avaaz⁹ of the Dark Side” by one of the consulted persons, CitizenGO presents itself as a global community of active citizens who use online petitions and actions to defend and promote life, family and (religious) freedom¹⁰. They emphasize promoting active citizen participation in public and political life on local, national and international level, so this platform, based in Spain, operates in eight languages (Italian, German, French, English, Russian, Polish, Portuguese, and Spanish). Arabic and Chinese version are in the planning stage.

Skillfully using the principles of participatory democracy as a disguise, CitizenGo actually works as a politically intelligent instrument, gathering numerous prominent figures of neo-conservative agenda in the EU¹¹ and centralizing advocacy actions against the right to abortion, marriage equality, assisted reproductive technology and sexual education in schools. In organized advocacy efforts against adopting three reports on SRHR status and gender equality in the EU (Estrela, Lunacek, Zuber), they have managed to gather about 350 000 support signatures in few months, and, while lobbying for each individual report, they have mobilized citizens to send tens of thousands of e-mail messages to the representatives in the European Parliament. That kind of numbers in support, as well as the range of influence should mostly be credited to Ignacio Arsuaga, the president of the CitizenGO platform and the founder of the organization HazteOir, who spent many years adapting online organizing and advocacy techniques used by conservative groups in the USA¹² to the political conditions in Spain and the EU.

Arsuaga founded HazteOir (Speak up) in 2001, and it became the leading organization that acted against liberal abortion law, passed in Spain in 2010. Strategically focused effort of that organization was finally embodied in the new, very limiting bill for regulating abortion, which was eventually abandoned by Spanish government in late September, 2014. One of the features of HazteOir, visible also in actions by CitizenGO platform, is sophisticated IT and communication system that allows their supporters to simultaneously sign petitions and send e-mails to 120 Spanish media, as well as to all the representatives in Spanish parliament, which often results in blocking recipients' user accounts.

⁹ Avaaz is a global online platform that uses petitions, media campaigns and protests to influence important and urgent issues nationally, regionally and internationally. Some of those issues are corruption, poverty, conflicts and climate change.

¹⁰ In the last few years, the Republic of Croatia has seen similar e-mail actions, conducted by an organization called Vigilare.

¹¹ One of the members of the Board of Directors is already mentioned Luca Volontè, now the president of the Novae Terrae, the foundation that promotes “human rights of the heterosexual marriage and human dignity”. CitizenGO also works closely with Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians, which has also been mentioned here, and with European Dignity Watch, one of the key platforms for networking, monitoring and articulating political demands of the neo-conservative agenda.

¹² Another member of the CitizenGO Board of Directors is Brian Brown, founder of The National Organization for Marriage, an American organization that acts against marriage equality in the USA. His associate Gregory Metz is a head coordinator for CitizenGO petitions in English language and the co-creator of the petition against the Estrela report.

Networking and cooperation among neo-conservative initiatives in the EU can also be observed in support (organized transport for the supporters) that HazteOir provided for the French initiative La Manif Pour Tous (Protest for everyone) during its protests against marriage equality in 2013, highly evocative of Spanish anti-abortion protests several years earlier. Besides opposing marriage equality, La Manif Pour Tous includes other threats in its agenda, mainly focused on issues like assisted reproductive technologies and surrogate motherhood for same-sex couples, and sexual education in French schools. However, after mobilizing citizens to act in local public arena, this group has upgraded its advocacy to a wider range – to European politics. They have started a campaign “Europe for Family”, in which they have gotten 230 French candidates in 2014 election for the European Parliament to sign the “principles” opposing marriage equality, trans* rights and sexual education in schools¹³. Also, La Manif Pour Tous is continuing with further networking and organizing neo-conservative initiatives in EU countries, which resulted in them starting local protests in Rome, Madrid, Warsaw, Brussels and Budapest in February 2014¹⁴.

La Manif Pour Tous Italia has been shaped after the French initiative and it is active in mobilizing Italian citizens against sexual education programs about gender equality. It also opposes legislation that includes sexual orientation, gender identity and expression as the basis for discrimination. Active in Italian neo-conservative movement are already mentioned Luca Volontè and Carlo Cassini. Cassini is one of the central figures on the European level whose positioning embodies links among local and national anti-choice organizations, “high” European politics and religious institutions. Cassini is the president and founder of Italian organization called “Movimento per la Vita” (Movement for Life)¹⁵, he is a former active representative in the European Parliament, he is a member of the Pontifical Academy for Life, a Vatican monitoring body focused on the issues of reproductive health and sexuality, and he is – as his frequent publications suggest – close to the controversial organization Opus Dei.

According to one of the consulted persons, neo-conservative organizing is often characterized by blurred lines between civil initiatives, organizations of civil society and political parties. There are some cases of European politicians who advocate certain points from neo-conservative agenda through their party activities on national and European level, and are also leaders in the local groups opposing SRHR. For example, Anna Zaborska, a Slovak representative in the European Parliament¹⁶ and a prominent member of the Slovak Christian Democratic Movement (KDH)¹⁷ – is also a part of the presidency in Forum of Life, an association of Slovak anti-choice organizations. Zaborska is also a member of the Honour Committee in the European Institute of Bioethics, which

¹³ Twenty two candidates who signed those “principles” have been elected to the European Parliament, and twelve of them are members of the extreme right National Front party.

¹⁴ A manifestation of this French mobilization movement has been present in the Republic of Croatia since 2013, shaped as the initiative “U ime obitelji” (In the Name of the Family), which copied the agenda of opposing marriage equality from La Manif Pour Tous, but is also using a similar logo.

¹⁵ Fondazione Vita Nova, a charity within the Movimento per la Vita has participated with 120 000 EUR in 80% of official finance for the initiative “One of Us”.

¹⁶ In 2013, Anna Zaborska also organized an introduction for the Croatian initiative “In the Name of the Family” in the European Parliament, within the panel of Intergroup on Family, rights of the child and solidarity between generations.

¹⁷ KDH was behind the suggestion that resulted in Slovak parliament passing a constitutional amendment defining marriage as a “unique relationship between a man and a woman” in June 2014.

provides professional support regarding issues of “life and (reproductive) health”, and specializing in the field of conscientious objection.

With the gradual networking and branching of local, national neo-conservative initiatives that gain influence mainly within borders of individual European countries, organizations that focus on lobbying and advocacy on pan-European level are formed. One of the key lobbying groups is European Dignity Watch (EDW)¹⁸, founded in 2010 to advocate “life, family and fundamental freedoms”, that openly attacks and accuses European institutions. They have accused European Commission of “pressuring” member states to legalize same-sex marriage, of collaborating with International Planned Parenthood Federation, and for hosting an exhibition about same-sex families. Another accusation was directed to European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), because of their research on discrimination against LGBTI population in Europe.

Just like EDW, there are other neo-conservative associations that are active on pan-European level and that have placed their headquarters in Brussels, the center of political power in the EU. One of them is the European Christian Political Movement (ECPM), which has been gathering Christian-democratic¹⁹ and Christian-social parties, organizations of civil society and consulting groups in Europe since 2005. In 2010, it has gained an official status on a European level, confirmed by the European Parliament, which also participates in its financing. Another organization that has a Brussels address is the Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (FAFCE), which was founded in 1997, and has gained a participative status at the Council of Europe in 2001. FAFCE has been gathering organizations that follow Catholic Church doctrine on family and sexuality²⁰, and it works closely with the Pontifical Council for the Family, one of the key Vatican bureaucratic bodies in influencing EU policies regarding SRHR. Before the European Parliament elections in 2014, both FAFCE and ECPM have published a list of candidates who have pledged to follow their agenda regarding SRHR in case of election victory²¹.

However, several consulted persons have pointed out that the most influential organization in promoting neo-conservative agenda of opposing SRHR is European Center for Law and Justice – ECLJ, headed by its director Gregor Puppink. ECLJ is a branch of American Center for Law and Justice - ACLJ²², a group which is present even in Africa, where it actively contributes to criminalizing homosexuality, including giving support to the law that suggested death penalty

¹⁸ Mother of Sophie Kuby, an executive director in EDW, is Gabrielle Kuby, the key catholic author that can be credited for the fabrication of the term “gender ideology”. Both of them visited the Republic of Croatia in 2013 – Sophie, to hold lecture titled “Mobilizing conservative powers in Europe for the culture of life”, and Gabriele – to promote a translation of her book, “The Global Sexual Revolution”.

¹⁹ A political party called HRAST – a movement for a successful Croatia, headed by several prominent advocates of neo-conservative agenda in Croatia, is a member of ECPM.

²⁰ One of the corresponding members in FAFCE is CRO-BIOS, Croatian Marriage and Family Alliance, an organization presided by Krešimir Miletić, who is also a president of the association for promotion of family values “Blaženi Alojzije Stepinac”, vice-president of the political party HRAST, and the head of the civil initiative called “I was an Embryo, too”.

²¹ Along with the public support she has gotten from EDW, Croatian representative in the European Parliament, Marijana Petir, has also signed FAFCE’s manifest. Petir is, among other things, known for having been elected the Croatian homophobic person of the decade in 2011 by Zagreb Pride Association.

²² ACLJ was founded in 1990 by a notorious homophobe and a Christian evangelist, Pat Robertson.

for same-sex sexual activities in Uganda²³. Along with the consulting status in the United Nations Economic and Social Council, which the organization has been holding since 2007, ECLJ in Europe operates on institutional levels of the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. In its efforts to dismiss SRHR, ECLJ uses various available mechanisms, ranging from direct advocacy meetings to submitting expert opinions, positional documents and memoranda²⁴. Puppinck himself acts as a coordinator for agents on various levels²⁵, so he is strategically included in leadership of two important initiatives, "One of Us" and La Manif Pour Tous.

At the end of the report, in the separate section, we give a more detailed overview of the main agents, organizations and initiatives that are close to the Catholic church in the Republic of Croatia and describe their actions in past several years. That section is our local contribution to documenting and providing information for some future mappings and analyses of neo-conservative agendas and strategies in the European context.

²³ Law that was passed by the parliament in December 2013 proscribed life in prison instead of death penalty, but the Constitutional Court has dismissed the law on grounds of procedural error, i.e. insufficient voting quorum.

²⁴ One of the cases that provoked reaction by ECLJ was a collective complaint against the Republic of Croatia, submitted in 2009 to the European Committee of Social Rights because of the government support and attempts to introduce discriminatory curriculum for sexual education in schools.

²⁵ Puppinck also represents Vatican in inter-governmental and expert committees in the Council of Europe, which has been made possible by giving the Holy See an observer status.

ALLIANCES AND NETWORKING

The presented overview of main agents that advocate neo-conservative agenda in the EU reveals the range of the network built to acquire wider support, and to increase political access and legitimacy for the Vatican demands. Having that objective, and similar to all the other political options, neo-conservative agents build tactical alliances. One of the consulted persons thus points to the visible tendency of small Christian-democratic parties that get about 10% of vote on national elections, and whose leadership often includes heads of local anti-choice groups – to form alliances with “secular” parties from the moderately right part of political spectrum. Those small parties accept all the demands of their allies, asking only “a few concessions” in issues regarding family sexuality and/or reproduction.

Since there is still a lingering question about the level of support/opposition for SRHR that can be expected from the newly elected European Parliament (2014-2019), the analysis of the election results made by European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development can provide lots of useful information. Using the vote result for Estrela report to presume position each political party would take regarding support or opposition to SRHR, analysis shows a small numeric advantage of pro-choice representatives – 349 vs. 338 of those who are perceived to oppose sexual and reproductive choices. However, the analysis warns that in certain national delegations within parties, or in case of some individual representatives, voting against party positions is allowed, and has already happened. Furthermore, the power ratio between pro/anti-choice fractions, as well as the political power in the European Parliament, will most certainly be influenced by 64 votes of “other” representatives (a significant 8,5% of them). They tend to form a very heterogeneous group, and introduce us to the new political parties whose affiliation to the existing, wider political groups is still not quite known (European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development, 2014).

Another feature of neo-conservative alliances and networking refers to the blurred lines between religious and secular, i.e. many co-operations between church and secular institutions, and civil agents who oppose public policy regarding SRHR. While some of those organizations are technically secular, their numbers and influence power comes from active believers. Also, some agents openly belong to catholic groups, or they are closely linked to the religious hierarchy. There are even some cases where certain national churches would take on themselves to conduct mobilization, providing logistic support for public and political actions²⁶. Besides that, it is safe to assume that certain part of financial means for those activities comes from church or wider church circles, and that certain people active in government bodies and/or political parties are also be-

²⁶ In the Republic of Croatia, all those forms of connections between church institutions and civil initiatives are present. Also, several important neo-conservative agents are in a close contact with the Catholic church, which specifically means that one person works for Zagreb archdiocese, another for Croatian Catholic University, and one of the most prominent figures is a priest from the Salesian order, an order with the foremost mission to “provide Christian upbringing for youth and adolescents”. Furthermore, the mobilization of the youth is conducted through catholic associations, such as Students catholic academic center, Youth pastoral and Caritas (Hudelist, 2014).

lievers belonging to the Catholic church, or that they are openly expressing affections for that institution. Having taken all that into account, we do not have any doubt that the final goal of the neo-conservative efforts is acquiring political power and including catholic political agenda into public policy and legislation.

Since this report focuses on the analysis of the Catholic church and its satellite organizations in the EU, we are only going to mention that there are some minority fundamentalist religious movements. Those movements also mobilize citizens through the protection of traditional/family values, just as Muslim and Hindu extremist do it in England. Furthermore, there is a topic that is outside the frame set up for this report, but is very relevant for researching connection and cooperation between church institutions and civil agents that obstruct SRHR. That topic is an open support by the Orthodox church hierarchy to the state-sponsored homophobic activities during the last several years in Russia, Macedonia and Serbia.

This report, however, discusses connections between neo-conservative groups in Europe and their like-minded counterparts in the USA. While their common political agenda towards the issues of family, sexuality and reproduction, as well as the “mentor” position of American agents as inspiration and transfer of experience, tactics and strategies of action (esp. online organizing) are quite obvious, their financial links often remain hidden. Main agents in the EU deny any financing from the USA, but the revision of American tax return documents shows that several groups there have invested in European neo-conservative entities in last few years. For example, in 2012 American Center for Law and Justice have sent 1,1 million dollars into the budget of ECLJ, its European branch, while the organization called Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) have spent over \$ 750 000 on financing its European program in the course of the same year (Feder, 2014). ADF is an organization of lawyers founded in 1994, and it advocates religious freedom rights through court trials, strategy development, education and financing services. ADF has developed a network of lawyer allies²⁷ and it is involved in interventions at the European Court of Human Rights. It also co-operates with ECLJ in training European Christian activists. On the other hand, according to the Transparency Register in EU, European Dignity Watch (EDW) has reported a EUR 95 000 budget for 2012, wholly provided by anonymous donations. The links that exist between the members of Board of Presidents in EDW and the members of multi-million (neo)conservative foundations, as well as the consulting groups from the USA (like The Heritage Foundation) still await a more detailed revision of trans-Atlantic financing (Ebels, 2012).

While the financial tracks between organizations are mostly not transparent, the links between individual persons from European and American neo-conservative groups are somewhat easier to follow. For example, among the members of Board of Patrons in American organization Catholic Family & Human Rights Institute (C-FAM) is Luca Volontè, one of the leading Italian and European agents. C-FAM presents itself as an organization that “defends life and family” on the international institution level, and advocates “opposing socially radical policies”. Besides that, C-FAM finances the blog called “Turtle Bay and Beyond”, one of the crucial intersection of all neo-conservative advocates online. Some of the contributors to that blog are Gregor Puppnick, Roger Kiska and Leo van Doesburg, a president of the Department of European issues and political counselling at

²⁷ Roger Kiska is a key legal advisor for ADF in Europe, which has its headquarters in Vienna. He worked for ECLJ until 2008, and has visited Croatia twice in past two years, giving lectures titled “Human Rights Struggle in the European Union” and “Secular Ideology in the EU”.

the European Christian Political Movement (ECPM). However, it seems that American connections do not mean only financial and logistic support by US partners anymore, but they include tendencies to build a global neo-conservative movement. In June of 2014, Luca Volontè, Ignacio Arsuaga – the president of CitizenGO and HazteOir, and Ludovine de La Rochère – the president of La Manif Pour Tous, have publicly supported “The March for Marriage” in Washington, an event organized by The National Organization for Marriage. In a meeting that was held behind closed doors, together with the representatives of some 70 countries, they have begun working on establishing an International Organization for Marriage (Feder, 2014).

I INFLUENCING

After reviewing neo-conservative acting strategies, main agents, their networking and alliances, we use this part of the report to analyze their direct political influencing activities regarding SRHR on the EU level. Our focus here are the examples of organized advocacy actions against adopting Estrela, Lunacek and Zuber reports in the European Parliament, and the example of the citizen initiative called “One of Us”.

Non-committing “Report on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights” by Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality, conversationally called the “Estrela report” by the rapporteur Edite Estrela, has been adopted in its parent Committee in July 2013, and should have been “routinely” adopted in the European Parliament in the course of several months. In its original version, this report highlighted gender inequality as the main obstacle in implementing SRHR for women, it included almost 90 comprehensive recommendations from the areas related to the SRHR policy in the EU, and it called on the member states to preserve and protect SRHR through programs and services dealing with sexual and reproductive health. The report also highlighted that SRHR are indeed basic human rights that must not be limited based on religion, and it recommended regulation and monitoring of conscientious objections in key professions, in order to ensure individual right to reproductive health care. The report also included specific recommendations that promote rights and health of LGBTI persons (European Parliamentary Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality, 2013).

However, in October 2013, the report was voted back for further editing, and in December, with 7 votes difference, a substitute resolution was adopted, drafted together by European People’s Party (EPP), a political party of right-center, and European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR). The resolution only shortly states that the policies related to SRHR are under the jurisdiction of each member state. Such voting result has ruined a long-standing legitimacy of the European Parliament as a political institution whose majority supports SRHR. What happened in those few months?

What happened was intensive advocacy by neo-conservative agents, operated through online petition platform CitizenGO and coordinated by EDW. What happened was a pressure shaped as 50 000 e-mail messages sent to parliamentary representatives, and additional 40 000 sent to members of the Committee for Women’s Rights and Gender Equality, in which they were misinformed that their vote for the Estrela report would mean disregarding “national legislation in member states”, as well as disrespect for “family and parental rights”. Finally, those messages stated that “the European Parliament has no right to vote on such issues”. Never ending stream of e-mail messages and repeating sound-bites were news for politicians in Brussels, who have never before encountered such a form of advocacy. It is therefore reasonably understandable that the representatives were consequently confused and indecisive, and that the small, but sufficient number of them who were misled by this magic trick, have voted against the Estrela report.

Shortly after that, in February 2014, another report relevant for this paper’s topic found its way to the European Parliament, where it was supposed to be adopted. It was the “Lunacek report”, named after the rapporteur Ulrike Lunacek, who, working within Committee on Civil Liberties,

Justice and Home Affairs, prepared a report that was fully titled “The Report on the EU Roadmap against homophobia and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity” (European Parliamentary Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, 2014). The report was written following the existing plans to stop discrimination based on gender, ethnicity or handicap, and it provided activities and measures to stop homophobia and transphobia in the EU. The action plan included in the report was not committal to the member states, but it was to serve as a warning to those countries who “tolerate” cases of homophobia and transphobia.

Using the mobilization momentum that was created during advocacy against the Estrela report, neo-conservative machinery has – as it was expected by now – started a fierce campaign against the Lunacek report. Without any change in strategy, a letter and a petition were published on the online platform CitizenGO, with plenty of misinformation on the content and the purpose of the report. It demanded from the European parliamentary representatives to reject the report, because, among other things, “EU member states must not create special rights because of the sexual behaviors of a small group of citizens”²⁸. However, despite more than 200 000 e-mail messages that were sent to representatives this time, the European Parliament has adopted the Lunacek report with a landslide (394 vs. 176 votes), thus deciding that LGBTI persons have rights to equality and respect, as well as inclusion into existing laws and mechanisms protecting citizens of the EU against any kind of discrimination.

A month after adopting the Lunacek report, and four months after rejecting the Estrela report, Committee for Women’s Rights and Gender Equality presented another non-committal report to the European Parliament. With its full title, “Report on equality between women and men in the European Union – 2012”, and conversationally known as the “Zuber report” by its author, Ines Cristina Zuber, the report provided a very detailed and comprehensive approach to the topic of gender equality, as well as quality suggestions related to the women’s rights protection in areas of work market, political participation, gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health (European Parliamentary Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality, 2014).

Following the same script and misinforming about the content and the purpose of the report, CitizenGO has produced a text, which calls the Zuber report “politically worthless” and “unnecessary for the EU”, also emphasizing now inevitable “dangers” brought on by “gender ideology” promotion, marriage equality and availability of abortion. European parliamentary representatives have received a little over 50 000 copies of such demands to reject the report, and an interesting point to mention is that CitizenGO has included alternative resolution by the EPP group in its petition, demanding its rejection on grounds that it is just a “diluted” version of the Zuber report. A British Christian lobbying group Christian Concern repeated the same demands, but added a direct explanation for denying support, saying that “the EPP group, after sad and shameful vote in case of the Lunacek report, has disappointed again” (Christian Concern, 2014). Both reports were finally rejected – the Zuber report had only 9 vote difference against it (298 vs. 289) – sending a disturbing message that the majority support for the women’s rights does not exist in the European Parliament.

²⁸ Let’s take a moment and remember the fact that even the most conservative estimates on the number of people in the EU who do not hide their non-heterosexual identity is for about 100 000 larger than the number of people who signed this petition. It is also a non-disputable fact that providing basic rights to all citizens does not mean giving special rights to some of them, and that providing rights to LGBTI population also means the righting the long time social injustice.

Besides influencing the EU policies by lobbying in the European Parliament, neo-conservative agents have used recently established tool to increase direct democracy in the EU to promote their agenda. European Citizens Initiative (ECI) is an instrument of participative democracy that has enabled citizens of the EU to address the European Commission (EC) with their suggestions to change certain policies and activities by the EU in certain areas by gathering over million signatures in at least seven member states. When they do so, the EC must consider their demand, and, if approved, act accordingly. Considering the large number of signatures required, it is difficult to imagine that ECI will succeed in presenting its demands without the support of powerful lobbying groups.

One of the only two ECIs that has managed to present its suggestions in front of the EC is the initiative called “One of Us”, which gathered a little under 1.9 million support signatures for its demand that the EU would recognize an embryo, a human embryo, as “one of us”. The official demand referred to the ban and repeal of all financing for the activities that include destruction of embryonic stem cells in research, development help and public health, “in the name of human dignity”. The implementation of such demands would mean immediate repeal of further research in the fields of medicine, especially the ones trying to improve therapies for degenerative diseases like diabetes, blood-related, as well as Parkinson and Alzheimer diseases. Such research uses superfluous stem cells up to seven days old, and that were produced by assisted reproductive technologies, voluntarily donated and already marked to be discarded. Also, stopping development help and financing programs by organizations that provide a wide range of sexual and reproductive health services would directly jeopardize public health in countries that need such help the most.

Finally, it is not difficult to assume that the hidden agenda in the “One of Us” initiative was establishing the dominance of “human life begins at conception” idea, which would create legislative basis for demanding abortion ban.

Some ten days after registration, in May 2012, the campaign to gather support signatures was presented in Vatican, with the introduction address by its ideological creator Carlo Cassini (Pontifical Council for the Laity, 2012), who has already been mentioned in this report. Along with Cassini, the leadership of “One of Us” includes, as a president, spokesman and the key legal expert – the omnipresent Gregor Puppink, and the initiative has appropriately placed its offices within the Catholic church in Brussels, only two minute walk from the European Parliament. In the EU context, Vatican is a foreign state body, and its support for the initiative that claims to represent demands by citizens of the EU has been very strong from the very top of the catholic hierarchy, receiving a public blessing by both pontiffs active during the signature gathering – Benedict XVI and Francis I. An advisory to act proactively in signature gathering, issued through the Council of the Bishops’ Conferences of Europe, was forwarded to the member state level, materializing in the Sunday sermons in churches across the EU. Along with drafting religious dignitaries, the initiative mobilized a wide network of local anti-choice groups that were considered responsible for gathering signatures in their national environments²⁹.

As far as the financing of all those assertive campaigns and activities are considered, an insight into the official budget of the “One of Us” initiative reveals that the 96% of the 160 000

²⁹ In the Republic of Croatia, that task was performed by the Croatian alliance for life, CRO-VITA, with one of the coordinators being Marije Živković, father of Željka Markić, the head of the already mentioned initiative opposing marriage equality, “In the Name of the Family”.

EUR comes from donations by two organizations whose presidents were also representatives in the European Parliament at the time: Carlo Cassini and his charity Fondazione Vita Nova, and the Spanish politician Jaime Mayor Oreja with the organization Fundacion Valores Y Sociedad. Given their “dangerous liaisons” with the catholic hierarchies and their political positions at the time of the initiative, it is highly doubtful if this initiative can even be called civil.

Finally, two years after the start of the “One of Us” initiative, in May 2014, the EC has reviewed its submitted demands, had a meeting with the organizers and a public debate in the European Parliament, and then decided not to start with the legislative change. It has established that the existing regulatory frame for financing, recently reviewed and accepted, is also the most appropriate one, whether considered from the perspective of research or the programs of the development help³⁰.

The described set of activities used in advocacy, as well as the initiatives and influences accomplished by the main holders of neo-conservative agenda in the last two years point to a worrying social momentum, whose sweep enables various institutions and organizations (from Vatican do EDW) to strongly advertise their acquired “wide support among the people”, and spin it to exercise further pressures to political decision-makers. However, when this support is compared with real numbers, i.e. 1.9 million of signatures vs. 500 million of the EU citizens who did not support this initiative, it is evident that the neo-conservative agents accomplish more influence than their real power in numbers. What we have here is a small, marginal, but very well organized and financed group of advocates for a fundamentalist religious-political agenda.

³⁰ Because of this decision, the initiative “One of Us” has filed a complaint with the General Court of the EU against the EC, the Council of Europe and the European Parliament (Von Krempech, 2014). Also, the latest news from the September 2014 speak about the establishing the European Federation “One of Us” that gathers 25 organizations and continues with the “defense of life and human dignity” (One of Us, 2014).

FINAL NOTES AND GUIDELINES

In the social and political environment that clearly shows increasing failure of evangelization, and with the strong consensus and support to the EU implementation of SRHR-related policies, the Vatican hierarchy and its civil allies have recently re-organized and enhanced their efforts towards influencing public policies regarding family, sexuality and reproductive health. Many member states are thus witnessing the ever intensifying and frequent oppositions to the SRHR implementation and achievements in the field of gender equality and anti-discrimination legislation. The development is also noticeable on the transnational, EU level.

Some of the main features that have been repeatedly highlighted as typical for neo-conservative groups and their actions are good organization and networking, increasing professionalism, and often, the lack of financial transparency. The significant influence they have started to achieve is disproportional to their real (small) number power, and is a result of a successful use of modern IT and communication technologies, as well as civil and political instruments complemented with generous use of manipulation and misinformation techniques.

On one hand, while acting in public arena, they implement the tactics for the conservative part of the population, manipulating the religious discourse and claiming the legitimacy of the “moral majority”. They also position themselves as “people”, as opposed to the political elites, which they accuse of passing laws and policies that endanger “traditional family” and/or “national values”, doing it all under the influence of the “gender ideology”. However, parallel with the rise and multiplication of their ideologies through actions of civil initiatives and organizations of civil society, neo-conservative agents try to achieve their influence through formal political processes and systems.

Therefore, they have adapted to the change that happened on the European level in moving and concentrating the political and decision-making power to the EU institution, and have accordingly built an infrastructure necessary to influence passing of directives and resolutions. Institutions in Brussels are now increasingly used as channels to promote catholic values and fundamentalist ideology, creating an atmosphere of increased neo-conservative influence on the political institutions, which makes the perspective of SRHR in the EU, seem rather pessimistic. It is always useful to repeat that this kind of extreme advocacy in defense of traditional, catholic values simultaneously aims to limit rights and discriminate against the “the others and different ones”, and that it basically comes down to attempts to influence secular laws, policies and practices that are outside of religion domains. Furthermore, accepting political demands regarding sex, gender, family, sexuality and reproductive health that have been shaped by neo-conservative political agenda would also mean establishing a theocracy, or issuing a “license” to withhold basic human rights and impose religious morality to everyone, regardless of their religious affiliation (or lack of it) and beliefs.

Given the information gathered in this report, it is necessary to realistically assess the power of neo-conservative interest groups, their organization and strategic networking, ability to mobilize citizens and the support expressed by religious hierarchies. They should not be underestimated nor ignored, for the actions of those groups result in concrete social and political consequences. With the objective in the realm of limiting the influence of neo-conservative agents regarding SRHR in the EU, and based on the insights gained through this report, we are proposing some guidelines for future advocacies and strategic confrontations.

Monitoring, informing and documenting

- » Provide resources for continuous monitoring and long-term analyses of neo-conservative initiatives' discourse, actions and tactics (think-thanks).
- » Utilize experiences gained by US organizations (such as Political Research Associates, Southern Poverty Law Center, and Truth Wins Out).
- » Gather and distribute information used to marginalize and discredit opposing reasoning, and create analytical base to define confrontation strategies.
- » Create documentation and archive that will provide concrete illustrations of neo-conservative agents' influence through the local examples.
- » Continuously inform politicians/decision-makers, media (find better ways to communicate the message/position to the public) and academic community (particularly in the fields of gender studies, law, sociology and psychology) in order to raise awareness and develop reasoning against oppositions' fact twisting and manipulations.

Reclaiming values and terminology in advocacy

- » Refute and denounce fact twisting and misleading the public by presenting accurate and truthful information, and re-affirm own agenda.
- » Reclaim the family and family values issues, observing them through the focal point of different types of families distinctive for the contemporary societies (possibly through the personal stories).
- » Claim and use ethical/moral reasoning (religion cannot monopolize this type of argument).
- » Set the frame for the concept of religious freedom as the freedom to publicly practice faith, which does not include freedom to discriminate or harm others.
- » Create more efficient and innovative advocacy strategies and methods.

Networking and building alliances

- » Ensure better connection between human rights organizations across regional and national, and European levels (as in The Alliance for Secular Europe).
- » Include new alliances and build a network of various partners (such as parents' groups and strategic allies on the state level).
- » Create a proactive approach to provide support, increase the number of allies and include citizens into human rights agenda regarding issues of family, gender equality, sexuality and reproductive health.
- » Ensure more pertinent engagements with religious allies who have progressive views regarding SRHR (find common ground and establish communication strategy).
- » Ensure public arena to voice opinions by progressive/liberal believers.
- » Exchange information, good practice examples and learned lessons.

I CASE: CROATIA

In the Republic of Croatia, a secular country with strong political influence by the Catholic church, organizations of civil society that promote the agenda of “protecting life, family and religious freedom” have started their public and politically more visible activities in 2006, during the attempts to introduce curriculum for sexual education program in schools. At that time, the association called “The Voice of Parents for Children” (Glas roditelja za djecu - GROZD) advocated its abstinence-based program, built on the foundation of catholic view on sexuality, sexual health, family and gender roles. While many feminist, LGBTI and human rights organizations strongly criticized that program, pointing out that it contained incorrect and discriminating information and that it was not compliant with Croatian legislation and international instruments for human rights protection, GROZD focused its reasoning on the issue of parental rights to educate children in accordance with “Croatian value system”, thus confining issues regarding sexuality into the frame of traditional hetero-cultural values.

Last few years in Croatia we have seen the rise in the number of groups and initiatives that conduct a local variant of Vatican political agenda in opposing sexual and reproductive health and rights. With the rise in numbers, those organizations have significantly enhanced their abilities to mobilize, network and lobby. Within their acting strategies, they tend to present certain citizens’ of the Republic of Croatia rights (such as the right to be informed and educated on sexuality and gender equality, right to marriage equality, right to free and autonomous decisions regarding one’s own body and reproductive life) as the issues of choice that is justified by the “freedom of religious conviction”, and around which they then create a discourse of cultural and ideological conflict, as well as deep division in Croatian society. Therefore, those groups actively work on preventing the introduction of health/sexual and civic education programs in schools, and they try to limit and refute the right to legal pregnancy termination. In 2013, they have managed to set up a constitutional referendum, which introduced a discriminatory definition of marriage as a union of a man and a woman into the Croatian Constitution.

Using democratic tool of civil referendum, just as filing Constitutional complaint and pointing out procedural errors at the attempts to introduce sexual education in schools are the proof of the tactical spreading and the change in mechanisms used by neo-conservative organizations and initiatives to reach their goals. Also, just like anywhere in Europe, Croatian “defenders of life, family and religious freedom” have started to claim a concept of human rights for their reasoning discourse, but they selectively emphasize traditional, catholic values. In their mobilization and advocacy actions, they have started to increasingly use online petitions and social networking³¹. Besides starting citizens’ initiatives, these groups advocate their ideas through the program of HRAST – A Movement for the Successful Croatia, a political party that advocates legal ban on abortion and assisted reproductive technology, as well as through the group of political parties called Alliance for Croatia.

The outline of the neo-conservative agenda in opposing sexual and reproductive health and rights in Croatia is a small group of very well connected people, mostly members of several

³¹ The initiative called “In the Name of the Family” has started a news portal (narod.hr) to further promote their ideas.

families that are interlinked by friendship and business, acting through a dozen of “citizens” organizations and initiatives³². Some of the most prominent figures in that network are managing successful companies, which greatly contributes to the financial resources for their public and political activities, although they claim their finances are based on private donations. While the financial support for those groups and initiatives remains non-transparent, the mobilization and logistic support provided by the very top of the Catholic church hierarchy in Croatia is more than obvious. For example, during the period in which they were gathering signatures to set up a referendum on the constitutional definition of marriage, they have managed to hire about 6000 volunteers, set up over 2000 signing locations, and conduct a wide-ranging campaign, actively supported even by the Archbishop of Zagreb, cardinal Josip Bozanić, who openly invited believers to vote FOR (marriage as a union between a man and a woman).

Prominent agents of curtailing implementation of sexual and reproductive health rights in the Republic of Croatia can even be named. They mostly consist of the members of Živković family, Markić family, Ilčić family, Ćurlin and Planinić family, and then, there are Vice John Batarelo and Stjepan Bartulica. Marijo and Darka Živković have been promoting catholic view on family life for years now, leading the Family Center organization since 1987. They are also members of Pontifical Council for Family. Two out of their six children, Mario Živković and Željka Markić, both medical doctors, have chosen to continue their parents’ engagements in protecting traditional Croatian family. Željka Markić, the head of the “In the Name of the Family” initiative is also a founder of the “Mary’s Meals Croatia” (Marijini obroci Hrvatska), close associate to the association called “Family Enrichment” (Obiteljsko obogaćivanje)³³, former vice-president of GROZD and an ex-president of the political party HRAST. On top of all that, she is an owner of two companies of the similar name: Sermon and SermonCRO. Sermon is a translation agency, which until recently employed a procurator Maria del Carmen Calvo del Valle, a Spanish citizen who publicly claimed that the objective of her coming to Croatia is to strengthen local position of Opus Dei. The other company, SermonCRO, works regionally and deals in pharmaceutical clinical trial. According to the official web-pages of the company, one of its sponsors is TEVA Pharmaceutical Industries, a company that, among other products, manufactures contraceptives. Željka Markić’s brother, Mario Živković, was also active in the “In the Name of the Family” organization at its beginnings, but has later suspended his media presence. He also manages several companies – among others, a branch of a pharmaceutical company. Financial reports of one of his companies clearly show that he is donating to his sister’s charity, “Mary’s Meals”.

Ladislav Ilčić and his sister Kristina Pavlović, have started with the implementation of their abstinence-based sexual education program “TeenStar” (originally developed in the USA) in 1996. Ten years later, they have founded the association GROZD, already mentioned in this paper. GROZD’s objective is promoting “basic family values”, and Ladislav Ilčić is also a president of the political party HRAST, and a member of the Varaždin city council. His other sister, Dr. Marija Ćurlin,

³² The graphical representation of this network, created for the campaign “Citizens vote AGAINST” (“against” refers to the referendum question: “Are you in favor of introducing a definition into the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia that would define a marriage as a union between a man and a woman?”) is available at http://glasajprotiv.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/octopus_dei01.swf.

³³ The association “Family Enrichment” holds educational programs developed by the organization called International Federation for Family Development, which has a consulting status at the UN’s Economic and Social Council, but is also closely connected to Opus Dei.

is a president of the association called “Center for the Natural Family Planning” (Centar za prirodno planiranje obitelji); a member of the political party presided by her brother, and is, along with her husband, active in “Mary’s Meals”. Marija Ćurlin has also been hired as an “independent” expert in creating a health/sexual education program promoted by Ladislav Ilčić for GROZD. Krešimir Planinić, a personal friend of both Markić and Ćurlin family, is a lawyer representing interests of the GROZD association and the “In the Name of the Family” initiative, but is also a co-founder and a board member in the “Mary’s Meals” association, presided by his wife Renata. The association is registered with the same address as Željka Markić’s company Sermon.

Stjepo Bartulica came back to Croatia from the US diaspora, has publicly admitted membership in Opus Dei, and is also a Commissioner for Religious Communities in the Office of the President of the Republic of Croatia. He started his “civil” activities in 2009, when he founded an association called “Center for Cultural Renewal” (Centar za obnovu kulture), which claims “promoting dignity of each human person” as its objective and focuses on “the field of youth education and upbringing”. In 2013 and 2014 he put his focus to work and organized a series of public appearances by Judith Reisman, a controversial US author who, among other things, advocates abstinence-based programs of sexual education. During her public appearances, Judith Reisman sent some “disturbing” messages to Croatian citizens, all of them regarding sexual/health education in schools. She called the recently introduced curriculum “a product of criminal, homosexual and pedophile efforts by Alfred Kinsey”.

Apart from Judith Reisman, Stjepo Bartulica also organized a visit by Lila Rose, extreme anti-choice US activist, who said that she had come here to “help create better pro-life movement”, and that it is necessary to “change legislation and limit abortion”. Also, many important European neo-conservatives, like Sophie Kuby or Roger Kiska, have visited Croatia as guests in “summer school for the youth”. All those activities were organized by Stjepo Bartulica and another member of Croatian diaspora, Vice John Batarelo, who came from Australia. Together and within the initiative called “I was an Embryo, too” (I ja sam bio embrij), those two have organized signing of a petition for banning abortion and denouncing the Law on assistive reproductive technologies. Vice John Batarelo is also a president of the association called Vigilare, head of the Office for family pastoral in Zagreb archdiocese, and the outside member of Croatian parliament’s Committee for Diaspora. Just like Željka Markić, he too is active in the “Family Enrichment” association.

In late September 2014, around the time this report was in its finishing stages, two events took place, pointing out the ways in which Croatian neo-conservative groups try to increase their approach to the political power. The political party HRAST signed an agreement on pre- and post-election coalition with Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica, HDZ), currently leading political party with 25% electorate support. At the same time, the “In the Name of Love” initiative started gathering signatures for another civil referendum, this time to change election system and introduce the preferential vote.

LIST OF CONSULTED STAKEHOLDERS

- »» Bruno Selun, European Parliament's Intergroup on LGBT Rights
- »» Florin Buhuceanu, Euroregional Center for Public Initiatives
- »» Fulata L. Moyo, World Council of Churches
- »» Gita Sahgal, Center for Secular Space
- »» Janna Kodde, sgpNEE, Netherlands
- »» Marta Szostak & Irina Costache, ASTRA - Central and Eastern European Women's Network for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
- »» Neil Datta, European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development
- »» Nigel Warner, ILGA-Europe/Council of Europe
- »» Pierre-Arnaud Perrouy, European Humanist Federation

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