

UNVEILING SUBVERSIVE POWER

Shedding light on the slow erosion of our democracies

WHO DIS

A Report



Justice for Prosperity



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A Report

It is becoming more dangerous for more people just to be. Our open societies, democracies, and ordinary citizens are threatened by targeted undermining by anti-democratic actors and activities.

Our democracies are under pressure from subversive forces, often undetectable to the public due to their multifaceted and invisible nature. Justice for Prosperity (JfP) is a non-governmental and non-profit organisation that aims to identify and unveil how the structures of subversion work, how they remain undetected and harm and endanger communities. We do this by using innovative information technologies to conduct extensive multi-source research as the basis of evidence-based publications. The goal of these activities is to turn the findings into easily accessible information and encourage public debate at a general society level to ultimately raise awareness of the subversive activities that threaten our democracies. JfP sees these threats through targeted attacks, the slow erosion of our democracies, polarisation, and extremism. Only if we fully understand the complex tactics used to undermine our human and democratic rights can we turn our knowledge into tools to protect our democracies against subversion effectively.

We materialise the Theory of Change that if we investigate and expose these threats, we can predict where they will hit next and defend ourselves better. Focussing on ultra-conservative actors, extremism, and populist parties, we unveil how these work towards achieving their goals. Finally, the training and knowledge we provide help people stay safe. So that people can keep taking their place in society. We are grateful to all the experts and community members who supported us in this research. You know who you are; your safety comes first.

This report is JfP's preliminary overview of subversion to determine modi operandi and not an exhaustive overview of actors. As JfP continues its research and investigations, more actors and modi operandi are examined and uncovered. To unveil and defend our democratic rights and open societies from these cloak-and-dagger threats.

Amsterdam, 25 April 2023.



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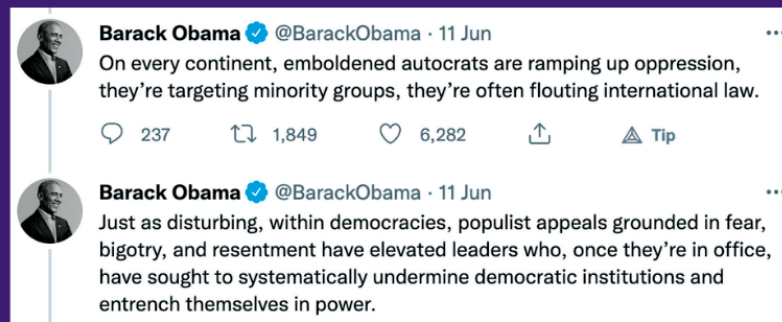
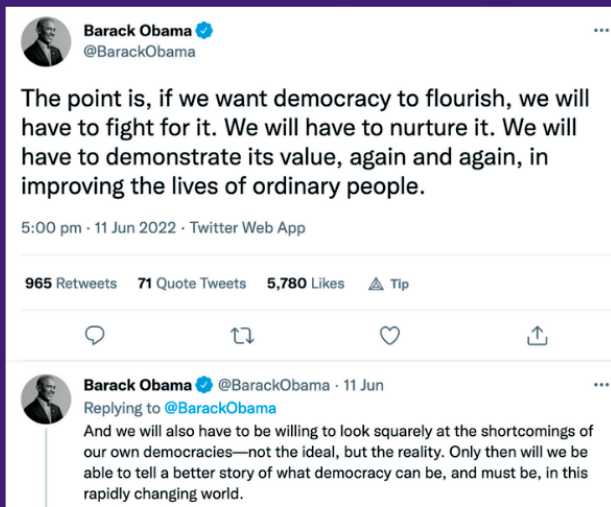
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President Barack Obama on Twitter after speaking at the Copenhagen Democracy Summit in May 2022

Foreword	6
Justice for Prosperity's WhoDis	8
Abstract	10
Societal Impact: polarised and extreme	14
Polarisation	14
Polarisation and Extremism	16
Why this matters	17
The Research	20
Subversion: Eight Tactics	21
Networking	22
Discourse	25
Training	26
Social media/internet	28
Funding	29
Infiltration of Influential Positions	32
Attacks on Rights Defenders	32
Reputational Harm	33
The Actors	34
World Congress of Families-International Organization for the Family	34
CitizenGO and HazteOír	35
Political Network for Values	37
Tradition, Family and Property	38
Other influential actors	39
Ordo Iuris	39
One of Us	40
Agenda Europe	40
Alliance Defending Freedom International (ADFI)	41
U Ime Obitelji	42
The Foundation for the Protection of the Family and Tradition	42
Aito Aviolitto	42
Zivile Koalition	42
La Manif Pour Tous	43
Iona Institute	43
Fondazione Novae Terrae	43
Coalitia Pentru Familie	44
The Institute of Christian Culture	44
Alliance for Family	44
Iskreni Institute	45
The Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe	45
Discourse: a Closer Look	46
Gender ideology	46
Parental rights and protection of children	47
Right to life	48
Protection of the family	49
Religious freedom	49
Freedom of speech	51
Why should we care? Recommendations	52
Methodology	55
References	56

Foreword

Aggressive foreign governments, oligarchs, populist politicians, and ultra-religious conservative organisations use subversive power to undermine civil and minority rights. They have become a **fundamental threat to our democratic stability**.

For this report, the term subversive power is described as coordinated soft-power actions undertaken by individuals, networks, and foreign governments to achieve their objectives of growing their position, influence, or financial resources and the tactics they employ to achieve these objectives.

Subversive actors achieve these ends by targeting specific rights, groups, and societies. Journalists, rights defenders, and (political) activists are regularly harassed, discredited, and threatened. We believe that they are on the 'subversive radar', and many tools are employed against them, from Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), money and reputational laundering, physical harassment at someone's home, sending paid fight squads to LGBTIQ+ marches or drag stores, hacking journalists' devices with Pegasus, and online attacks on (credibility of) journalists (European Federation of Journalists, 2021) using, e.g., #mediascum, or troll farms spreading disinformation against activists in the LGBTIQ+ community (Bonny, 2019), including through 'digital authoritarianism'.

In addition, far-right extremists can sometimes be attributed to starting online campaigns or profiting from them. A then-established discredited reputation is used as a narrative and platform for local politicians that share the position. Subversive actors sometimes control the media and use it to their advantage; Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference

(FIMI) is the topic of important research done by the European External Action Service (EEAS, 2023).

It has become increasingly difficult to disentangle extreme narratives from mainstream political rhetoric. **The rising tide of polarising language shrinks the societal space available for nuanced debate.** This escalates into fierce (online) attacks on vulnerable groups' fundamental rights and, with that, our democracies. In some cases, this has led to intimidation and violence at the hand of angry crowds or authorities, directed at groups that include scientists, voters, politicians, teachers, and journalists reporting in the street from Amsterdam to Madrid often hiding their logos to avoid being identified as such. Before emerging physically and causing visible damage, these powers build strength under the radar. They mainly operate outside the criminal legal domain, so it is difficult to detect, investigate and counter under criminal law.

One striking thing is that though much work has been done on the erosion of certain liberties and rights, it is not a common topic in the press. It took the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* to spark public outrage. But the concerted action to overturn the federal right to abortion had been ongoing long before the US Supreme Court ended it. Let us not be mistaken: the same efforts are being made in the EU and are increasingly successful. **As will become clear from this report, it is time that we see these efforts for what they are: threats to our democracies and human rights.** 'They never take their eye off the ball', Ms Wendy Via of the Global Project against Hate and Extremism, said about these actors' singular dedication to their cause.

It is time we do the same.

Only four months before Russia invaded Crimea, a delegation of high-ranking officials from the ultra-religious American organisation World Congress of Families (WCF) visited Ukraine to lobby for Russian (Orthodox) principles and anti-EU messages from the Kremlin.

The WCF had been very vocal about supporting Russia's 'anti-gay propaganda law' by signing a petition and stating that a 2011 WCF summit in Moscow had helped support the law's passing (Christian NewsWire, 2013a). Part of the leadership team were important figures, including WCF Communications Director Don Feder, Srdjan Nogo, a former leader of the Serbian parliamentarian pro-family group Dveri and WCF partner who was expelled 2019 from Serbian parliament for sedition, and Fabrice Sorlin, a WCF representative affiliated with sanctioned oligarchs, and lobbyist for the 'Yellow Vests' and the so-called Donetsk People's Republic in France (Christian NewsWire, 2013b; Danas, 2020; IOF, 2017). **Alexey Komov, the prominent WCF Representative for Russia**, was also present (Christian NewsWire, 2013b) and was set to speak at the following **'WCF VIII' international conference in Moscow in September 2014** (PR NewsWire, 2014). Meetings were held about the **pressure on Ukraine's people to accede to the 'homosexual agenda' as a condition of joining the EU** (Christian NewsWire, 2013b).

On 20 February 2014, Russia successfully invaded Crimea with the goal of annexation. The **WCF conference was held in the Kremlin and Duma under a**

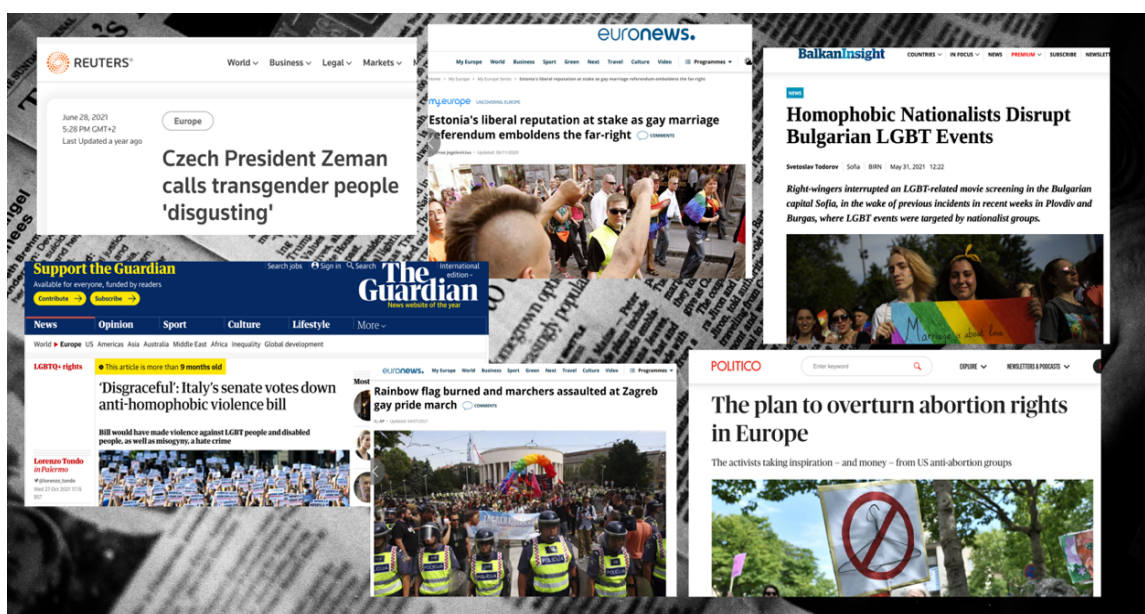
different name because of 'logistics' concerns from the US branch due to the United States' formal response to the annexation (Christian NewsWire, 2014). High-ranking WCF officials from the US still actively attended, including Don Feder (Right Wing Watch, 2015). As did Alexey Komov. **Conference sponsors were Konstantin Malofeev and Vladimir Yakunin** (Searchlight Mag, 2015). Both were **sanctioned for financing the annexation** of Crimea. The same **Komov and Malofeev** that would later be **reported** as being involved in **supporting** – or as some would have it, influencing – well-known **European politicians and EU Members of Parliament** (New Lines Magazine, 2022; EU Observer 2017; RFI, 2014 & 2015).

On 17 March 2023, The Pre-Trial Chamber II of the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants against President Putin and his Commissioner for Children's Rights Lvova-Belova, on the 'reasonable grounds to believe that both bear criminal responsibility for the unlawful deportation and transfer of Ukrainian children from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation,[...]' (ICC, 2023).

We found evidence that **suggests Malofeev has been financing the transportation of Ukrainian children to Russia** through one of his **charity organisations**, with projects referred to as *'The Return'* and *'Happy Childhood'*. **At the time of this publication, neither Komov nor Malofeev's charity organisation are sanctioned, allowing them to continue their business unhindered.**

Justice for Prosperity's WhoDis

It is becoming more dangerous for more people just to be. Our open societies, democracies, and ordinary citizens are threatened by targeted undermining by anti-democratic actors and activities. Every day across Europe, people risk their lives and/or livelihood to report on, advocate for, defend, and protect our democracies, our rights, and our freedoms. Journalists, rights defenders, scientists, teachers, and ordinary people going out to vote, are under siege from subversive powers. We see them attacked in the courts, online, and on the streets. Most of the time, they don't even know by whom. Other times they are painfully aware they are up against powerful forces like an oligarch, kleptocrat, or autocratic government, but don't know how to defend themselves. This highlights how uneven the playing field is, and this gap allows subversive powers to exploit vulnerabilities.



News clippings compiled by JfP

Our research shows that actors driven by ideological, financial, and political motivation use varying **tools to grow their power**, reputation, and bank accounts. They then use these resources to implement their long-term strategic plans, that gradually strip away people's freedoms and attack human rights. Subversive powers are dangerous because of their patient, clever, and covert nature. And even if discovered, this most often remains a victimless crime in the eyes of the public.

WhoDis, the informal shorthand for "Who is this?", and the title of JfP's flagship initiative: the goal being to unveil how subversion works, who is doing it, and fight against it.

From our experience and this research, it has become evident that current instruments are insufficient to measure subversion effectively. Like governments use statistics on, say gun violence, to inform policies on gun control, we can only effectively protect those who stand up for our democracies by understanding the weapons used against them.

Our effort here aims threefold: to see the problem, understand it, and counter it. First, we establish that there is a problem facing our democracies. We put together prior research into actors with our own research to conclude that we have a problem but that we

still don't see how big it truly is. Then, we extract the commonalities to understand how this subversion works more deeply. Finally, not until we fully understand it, can we turn our knowledge into tools to fight back and protect against subversion. The initial scope of this research is Europe, including Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans, but specific (state) actors/organisations, from, for example, the United States, are included as part of the global spider web of actors.

This report is JfP's preliminary overview of subversion to **determine modi operandi** and not an exhaustive overview of actors. We continuously research subversive anti-democratic actors, activities, and relationships between various segments on the right side of the spectrum: the ultra

(conservative) **religious**, the **populist right-wing** parties (and politicians), and right-wing **extremists**. As we continue our research, we will uncover more actors and modus operandi. This ranges from the use of strategic litigation, disinformation, include organisations such as the Dialogue of Civilizations, the European Christian Political Movement (co-founded by Dutch political party Christen Unie), Civitas Christiana, to movements known as Generation Identity and extremist ideologies such as 'great replacement' and the 'demographic winter'. Our efforts also focus on organisations, political parties, and movements that receive government or EU subsidies, and/or potential foreign financial funding. It is the foundation of our tech-enabled and data science-supported knowledge hub: **WhoDis**.



Photo by [Jeremy Bishop](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Abstract

Democracy is the avenue through which policy is made, freedoms are expressed, and people can influence change. It is a great good as the foundation for our free market and open economies, and what allows an inclusive society to safely flourish for all citizens.

Yet, some forces work to undermine that democracy. They aim to strategically further an undemocratic agenda with a playbook of different resources, tactics, and strategies. They succeed in gradually stripping away liberties, voices and representation, and societal reputation in their course. Because of its multifaceted and invisible nature, subversion often is undetectable to the public yet has severe consequences in the end. Something that has most recently become painfully clear in the war in Ukraine, and the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in the United States. Justice for Prosperity (JfP) aims to identify and unveil how these structures work, remain undetected, and harm and endanger vulnerable communities. And with that, our democracies.

In exploring how different actors and groups undermine democracy and human rights, we use the terms “actors” and “**subversion**”. Subversion encompasses strategically utilised resources under the guise of positive missions and initiatives to achieve political and societal change. The actors start with targeting specific groups of vulnerable people. They paint their targets instrumentally as societal threats, as immoral (e.g., the LGBTIQ+ community), as inferior or as a hindrance to the traditional European identity (e.g., migrants and people of colour), as religiously and ethically wrong (e.g., women’s right to choose), amongst other issues. These harmful agendas and radical ideas are opaque to move their opinions through social and institutional structures in a palatable way. In this report we demonstrate how they are **cloaked in seemingly positive narratives**, hidden in agendas, narratives, financial and political support, and cleverly positioned as critical

proponents in crucial spaces. As you can only fight what you see after understanding how it works, we will identify the *modi operandi* of these actors. Of those we will highlight eight specific tactics which allow for such influence and indoctrination. Our observations on these *modi operandi* (from now on, ‘tactics’) draw from a concise but not exhaustive review of existing research into anti-rights actors, open-source intelligence research (OSINT), and interviews with field experts. And our work in this field – and this research – will continue until everyone plays fair in full transparency.

We currently observe the **main tactics** used in subversive power: network, discourse, training, social media/internet, funding, infiltration of influential positions, attacks on human rights defenders and destruction of their target’s reputations. We will briefly touch upon how these are used and how they threaten the fabric of our democracies.

Networks are an essential tactic used by actors. Not only do their under-the-radar networks expand their outreach to a global scale, which also extends the danger towards victims to a global scale, but it allows for large spaces in which extremism and hate fester. An example is the leadership of Spanish CitizenGO, its Board of Trustees includes Brian Brown, president of United States-based International Organization for the Family, the National Organization for Marriage, (and president of the World Congress of Families) and Luca Volonté of Italian-based Novae Terrae (CitizenGo, n.d.; WCF, 2016).

Actors are intentional with their message using a certain **discourse** to mainstream

their narrative. We see them use positive language and messages, such as #freespeech, #familyvalues, and 'rights of the child', to attract people to their cause. This research will highlight examples. Such positive connotations make it almost impossible for the mission to seem maleficent or harmful, despite it being so. It is clever marketing.

Another tactic is the use of **training**. Training is one of the most crucial components of the actor's tactic because particular extremist ideologies are taught to be the foundation of thinking and are taught hand-in-hand with specific methods to execute their agendas and ideologies and target particular communities. Pieces of training are accomplished methodically through workshops, sessions, conferences, and personal relations.

Another powerful tactic is the organised use of **social media/the internet**. Social media has dramatically increased polarisation and fostered environments for hate and extremism (Su et al., 2022). The power of social media, combined with actors' missions and behaviour, can quickly mobilise and indoctrinate the masses, which later leads to real physical action (attacks on victims of different communities) as well as political action (by those involved in the agendas). The use of social media/internet expands actors' outreach, aids in positively presenting the mission, and attracting more people as demonstrated by YouTube star and founder of America First, Nick Fuentes, and Blake Masters (Republican Senate candidate, Arizona, US) (Politico, 2022). The way these messages are spread takes advantage of evidence that people find emotionally stimulating (or even angering) messages, from sources they see as credible, to be true even if the content is false (and without critically thinking about it) (Christopher & Matthews, 2016). This is also seen with targeted disinformation campaigns at target

communities, such as the LGBTIQ+ community in the EU which is used as a weapon of foreign influence (European Parliament, 2021). An appreciation of the conservative Christian right in the US for Russia's foreign and Hungary's national policy ranges from the presence of former US Vice President Mike Pence as a guest at the Budapest Demographic Summit alongside Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in 2021 (see also Discourse, Protection of the Family) to events presented in late night satire such as the Daily Show with Trevor Noah (Daily Show, 2022; Boston Review, 2022).

The most powerful tactic is that of **funding**. At these actors' disposal are multiple income streams and sizable budgets. Crucial is the prominence and influence of private, corporate, religious, and political donors supporting their causes. With that, their political power and institutional standing grow, allowing for a significant return on investment through the continuation of their agenda and more funding. Seeing this direct impact, they attract more donors and supporters to the actors' organisations and missions. The amounts invested are staggering.

The **infiltration** of influential positions is most closely tied to funding. By establishing democratic representation, aggressive actors can build democratic and societal credibility. While creating this credibility, they simultaneously participate in subversive activities which promote dangerous and hateful ideas to their supporters. This tactic is also a result of a combination of tactics described thus far.

Without moving pieces in government and international organisations or spaces such as the United Nations and bodies of the European Union, these agendas can't be strengthened or taken to a global scale as easily.

Not only do subversive actors strategically move around their resources and people, but they induce **attacks** both online, offline, and in the courts through litigation with the effect of (self-)censorship and a chilling effect. They foster an environment for hate speech and violence, teaching and triggering their supporters to mobilise against their target groups. This can be seen with state actors undermining each other, regimes repressing people outside their state's territory (Al-Jizawi, et al., 2022; NED, 2021), or other actors mobilising support groups. Attacks can be physical or emotional and occur in person, online through harassment and hate speech, and even include state violence and police intervention.

An example of this were the violent 'counter-protests' against the Tbilisi Pride March in 2021 in Georgia. The counter-protesters stormed the city centre and the gathering place of the Pride supporters, tearing flags, breaking windows, and engaging in physical attacks (Amnesty International, 2021). This violence led to the death of a cameraman covering the events. Along with the other tactics, these attacks ward off many activists or citizens who delay or cancel demonstrations and advocacy events due to safety concerns.

The final tactic is damaging their target's **reputation**. If the target's reputation is destroyed, their mission is also destroyed. If one, for instance, is accused of acts or crimes they did not commit, or painted as a pedophile, their credibility and followers are damaged. This tactic also involves the use of SLAPPs where favourable libel laws are taken advantage of to keep journalists from investigating or writing about an organisation or to destroy the livelihood of that journalist by tying them up in legal expenses. We see actors use this tactic, or along with 'reputational laundering', a method used to hide subversive behaviour under the guise of philanthropy, relations to NGOs, universities,

and institutes, amongst other positive actions (Wolcott, 2022).

When these tactics come together, we see the successful execution of the subversive actors' agenda and the damage to their target communities. The tactics of network and discourse harm communities by building a fortified front against human rights, enabling these groups to organise and gain support, gradually diminishing people's freedoms. The tactics of training and social media/internet combined with network and discourse have a more direct physical impact and often escalates to violence when these actors' supporters mobilise.

Through funding and the strategic placement of influential actors in parties and (international) institutions a.k.a. **infiltration**, actors can methodically push their agendas under a political or 'democratically' intentioned guise. Using legal and political avenues and via social and religious groups, actors have raised about 437.7 million dollars from Europe alone (Datta, 2021). Funding paired with strategic use of NGOs and state support to NGOs and other public initiatives (*state funding*) creates an almost unbeatable combination of tactics (ibid). This use of resources shuts down the legislative maintenance of certain rights and freedoms, calls them into question, and makes them easily debatable. This normalises polarised debate and shrinks societal space, especially through political discourse.

When it comes to the final tactic of attacks, the impact is often personally felt. Activists, journalists, and human rights defenders can be made the target of harassment, such as in the case of Nelly Munyasia in Kenya, who suffered severe attacks for her work were catalysed by CitizenGo (Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 2022). In our field research, we interviewed Klementyna Suchanow, Co-Founder of All Poland Woman's Strike, who stated she constantly

experiences threats, ranging from excessive hate and bullying on social media by troll farms to threats to her physical safety.

In our interview with Rémy Bonny, Executive Director of Forbidden Colours a Brussels based LGBTIQ+ advocacy organisation, he mentions that the difference between violence and danger can vary by country. This is an essential point as levels of endangerment can be more complex or life-threatening in the Global South, the CIS countries, for people of colour, and intersectionality.

An instance of this difference is the murder of well-known transgender rights defender Hande Keder, killed in August 2016 and discovered on the side of the road in Istanbul (Amnesty International, 2017). Another is the instance of prominent Brazilian human rights defender, Francisca Chagas de Silva, a leader of the Union of Workers and Rural Workers of Miranda do Norte, who was murdered, discovered naked in a puddle of mud, showing signs of rape, strangulation, and stabbing (Front Line Defenders, 2017).

Standing up for justice in different countries can hold consequences of varying extremes. Actors may even be state actors undermining the very democracy they vowed to defend, those groups who participate in subversive activities and place their critical members in high positions, or anyone trying to

undermine democracy with a robust agenda and resources to follow-up.

In Europe, we believe we face a smouldering threat to democratic liberties whose **deterioration is intentionally normalised**. This is a significant avenue of undermining democracy - using what people see, know, are familiar with and reframing it for harmful underlying agendas targeting specific groups. Actors are playing into sentiment and tension in society, using topics as the restrictive consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, migration, World Economic Forum meetings or myths like an 'elite of pedophiles drinking the blood of our children', while simultaneously patiently working to further their hidden conservative agendas. We, as a society, are apparently quite receptive to these (conspiracy) theories making us increasingly vulnerable to toxic polarisation.

The issues and tactics highlighted in this report are but a first step into the spiderweb of the actors' world and agenda and their *modi operandi*. JfP continues its journey in investigating and exposing these actors, predict where they will hit next, and defend those under siege with the necessary tools.

The actors may be clever in using century-long tactics based on power politics and manipulation. However, democracy is built to withstand if we are willing to nurture it and fight for it.

Societal Impact: polarised and extreme

The positions, ideologies, and messages of the actors described in this report are, in principle, no different from 20 years ago. However, we view that using the *modi operandi* (as described in this report) to further extreme positions, ideologies, anti-democratic ideas, and antagonistic messages is more successfully hidden and wrapped in such a way that **mainstreams** them and makes them part of public debate. In our view, that makes it undermining our democracies and a threat to our open societies. With that, their actions have a polarising effect or add to a toxic dynamic of polarisation, even leading to (violent) extremism.

Polarisation is seen across societies globally. It is understood to happen when we take our different political attitudes to ideological extremes (Conway, et al., 2020). When these differences are combined with spending more and more time in our bubbles, and we are exposed to **disinformation**, this divergence becomes stronger (Gerrand, 2020). As ordinary citizens, we often attribute polarisation to our politics, our religious, socio-economic, or cultural ideologies, and even the perception of reality and what we think are facts (Harteveld and Rekker, 2022). We can ask ourselves why it seems we are more polarised now than before – is polarisation on the rise because we are more opposed?

Polarisation

Not all polarisation is bad or toxic. Over the past decade, political scientists have been researching what is known as ‘affective polarisation’. It is about how sympathetic people are towards political ingroups versus outgroups; it is polarisation based on what we think about each other (Iyengar, et al., 2012; Harteveld, et al., 2022). Where affective polarisation is enormous mutual trust is low, and antagonism is high. This form of polarisation is of concern because it sets citizens against each other (Harteveld, et al., 2022). Another form of polarisation is ‘factual belief polarisation’ (Harteveld and Rekker, 2022). People perceive objective reality differently and believe in ‘alternative’ facts.

Affective polarisation is on the rise and impacting democracies globally in different ways (Harteveld, et al., 2022). Most research on polarisation and the relationship among the ideological, affective, and factual beliefs as the three main poles of polarisation has focused on the US (Iyengar, et al., 2012; Iyengar, et al., 2019). Still, more and more research is being done on Western Europe

(Harteveld, et al. 2022). Especially, Western Europe has been polarised around cultural issues and popular radical right parties (Harteveld, 2021). Take the Netherlands; 2021 research by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research shows that Dutch citizens perceive polarisation as a growing problem and are more agitated by negative and polarising opinions (Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, 2022). At the same time, research has also shown that ideological polarisation in the Netherlands has not risen much in comparison with other countries (Harteveld, 2021). A new influence is that there is much more media attention for the topic itself and polarisation in politics (Dekker, 2022). Certainly, the use of the internet and social media platforms add to how fast things spread and to people staying in their bubbles (BRaVE, 2020).

Human kinds’ **biological information processing capacity** grows no more than 1% per year, while the world’s technological capacity to store and telecommunicate information grew with a compound annual

growth rate of 25 – 30 % between 1986 to 2007 (roughly five times faster than economic growth during the same period), and our technological capacity to compute information has even grown between 60 % - 85 % annually (more than 10 times faster than our economic capacities) (Hilbert, 2012). This is something the Russian propaganda model, referred to as the ‘Firehose of Falsehood’ plays into with its distinct features of being **‘high-volume and multichannel’**, ‘rapid, continuous, and repetitive’, it ‘lacks commitment to objective reality’, and even ‘lacks commitment to consistency’ (Paul and Matthews, 2016). Our brains are lazy, and especially in the face of information overload – of which there is plenty – like to use shortcuts to determine if information is trustworthy (Metzger and Flanagin, 2013). Simple, emotionally charged messages that confirm our biases, are more attractive to our brains (Paul and Matthews, 2016). As ideological news media may fuel the polarisation of how people see the world (Davis and Dunaway, 2016; Garret et.al., 2019), we can start to understand that a combination of these elements leave us more vulnerable to intentional manipulation and polarisation than we think.

A study by Hartevelde (Hartevelde, et al., 2022) about the role of populist radical right parties in fueling affective polarisation covering 103 elections in 28 European countries, found that these parties have a particular place in affective polarisation. Supporters of these parties are **uniquely hostile** towards supporters of mainstream parties (the ‘outgroups’) and vice versa. The study describes how populist parties combine populism and nativism, which both pit ‘the elite’ against ‘the people’, ‘as well as natives versus non-natives’, as the foundation of their politics. In addition, radical right-wing populists claim that non-natives threaten the nation-states they live in and that the governing ‘elite’ is conspiring against them (ibid). Most importantly, the study describes,

‘Once the ideological differences between mainstream and PRR parties get supplemented with ingroup– outgroup thinking and feelings of enmity, or even hatred, along party lines, it becomes increasingly hard to make political compromises. This could have severe consequences for the functioning of liberal democracies.’

Knowing that people follow the lead of political parties they affiliate with, combined with the antagonistic messaging of populist right-wing parties, the study found that this fuels mutual dislike. Their analysis shows that the antipathy of populist right-wing parties against their opponents is exceptionally high and goes beyond their ideological distance (Hartevelde, et al., 2022).

Another recent study on factual belief polarisation looked at how citizens are not only polarised around their opinions of each other but also their **perception** of reality and what facts are. The study sought to examine how strong a potential association is between polarisation based on how people see each other and what happens when they no longer share a common sense of reality (Hartevelde and Rekker, 2022). The study reasoned that if people think their opponent doesn’t just have wrong ideas but does not understand reality, they will grow even further apart. Zooming in on the Netherlands and voter sentiments in the 2021 parliamentary elections, the study found factual belief polarisation around immigration, economic redistribution, and an extreme polarisation on climate change (ibid). The study notes ‘most starkly, those who favour measures against climate change are much more convinced that global warming is man-made. The magnitude of factual belief polarisation is substantial around this issue: Those who are least open to climate measures assign a 37% likelihood that climate change is manufactured, against 91% among those most supportive of climate measures’ (ibid).

It also proved that citizens most affectively polarised are most likely to have factual beliefs that match their attitudes (towards others). In other words, if you have strongly negative views of another group, you will most likely believe in facts that meet those opposing views, whether these are true or

not. This was especially the case with climate change (Harteveld and Rekker, 2022).

If this is possible around climate change – would this also be possible on topics such as abortion rights, self-determination rights, LGBTIQ+ rights, and education?

Polarisation and Extremism

A widely accepted definition of extremism also revolves around **ingroup versus outgroup** thinking. Here, the success and survival of the ingroup are threatened by an outgroup, and they are both willing to take defensive positions for their survival and success (Berger, 2018). Extremism turns violent when the use or threat of violent action by ‘irregular actors in the pursuit of political aims to erode democratic processes and pluralistic values’ (Conway, et al., 2020; Mc-Neil, et al., 2019).

A 2020–2021 European Commission H2020-funded project, ‘Building Resilience Against Violent Extremism (BRaVE) Project’, understands polarisation and (violent) extremism as distinct but interlinked, phenomena (Watkin, et al., 2022). The project revolved around workshops to understand how online platforms can disrupt the narratives underlying polarisation and (violent) extremism. (Violent) extremists use a polarised climate to **draw people into their narratives of victimhood** and disadvantage at the fault of the outgroup, most often those that actually suffer the most from socio-economic and political inequalities (ibid). These groups are the subject of this report: the LGBTIQ+ community, immigrants, and women’s rights. Referring also to a 2016 Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) research, the European Commission project notes that ‘sharp psychological division between ‘us and them’ within a polarised environment ‘may act as an incubator for hate and violent extremism (and, potentially, ultimately terrorism)’ (ibid; RAN, 2016).

People are more willing to take up extremist positions and are increasingly more willing to take up violence as a legitimate way of defending their success and survival.

During a United Nations High-Level Meeting, Secretary-General Guterres on 30 November 2022, presented his first report on terrorist attacks based on xenophobia, racism, and other forms of intolerance, or in the name of religion and belief, also referred to as far-right terrorism (United Nations, 2022). At this UN High-Level meeting, the report was presented as a landmark in finding that far-right terrorism is no longer considered to be of only national consequences, but **a rising international threat**.

Referring to the attacks in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019, Utøya, Norway, in 2011, the recent shootings in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and Bratislava, Slovakia, both on LGBTIQ+ bars, the United Nations Security Council’s Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) noted a 320 per cent rise in attacks committed by individuals affiliated with ‘right-wing terrorism’ between 2014 and 2018.

From these attacks and the individuals committing them, the use of **online platforms** to radicalise, recruit, spread information, plan attacks, and even target children by far-right groups has become more evident to more authorities.

Their skilled misuse of social media platforms, or gaming platforms, shows their ability to circumvent platform regulations and the difficulty for authorities to catch and stop them.

Something JfP also sees as members of the Extremism and Gaming Research Network (EGRN), and our research on online hate speech in the European Observatory of Online Hate (EOOH) where **we measure the toxicity of the online debate by scraping social media platforms**. This results in an ease of spreading hate, extremist, and violent messaging (RAN, 2022). The report stresses the role of these often xenophobic and misogynistic ideologies and narratives, how varied these are, and often contradictory (blatant contradiction is also seen in the 'Fire Hose of Falsehood' of the Russian propaganda model (Paul and Matthews, 2016)), in motivating individuals in the far-right movement to violence (United Nations, 2022). It is more likely for Americans who

hate their political opponents to share fake news about them on Twitter, 2020 research showed (Osmundsen, et al., 2020).

In November 2022, Moonshot's Threat Bulletin reported that Google searches for antisemitic terms had increased by 285% that month. Reporting that a perceived **'normalisation' of antisemitism** in regular public discourse is what celebrities, including Kanye West and Kyrie Irving, are being celebrated for. Moonshot further wrote that with more 'mainstream voices' involved, violence and threats against the Jewish community are likely to grow. JfP's research within the EOOH has also found an increase in online antisemitism and its connectedness with other topics, including immigration, anti-LGBTIQ, anti-women, and conspiracies around climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. It is safe to say polarisation and extremism are pervasive and like each other's company.

Why this matters

As far as this report is concerned, we do not argue nor deny a causal relation between polarisation and these actors; more research would be necessary. However, we do describe that they may be perceived as being in polarisation's orbit. In our hypothesis, this may be perceived on several levels:

- Because their (extremist) messaging and narratives are antagonistic and **incite intolerance** and even hate against other groups (therefore reinforcing the ingroup-outgroup phenomenon)
- Because this leads to **increased violence**, harassment (online) or hate crimes
- Because they are (intentionally) connected to other groups or movements and use networking as a shared tactic. Whether political or ideological, that further **reinforce polarisation** or extremism.

Despite the actors described in our research likely being pitted in the category of ideological polarisation, we perceive their actions from a different perspective. This report describes ties, relations, funding, and networks with political populist parties. Especially with regards to affective and factual belief polarisation, it is our perception that such relationships have a fueling effect

on polarisation. In addition, both (violent) extremist and polarising messaging relies on and thrives using the internet and social media (BRaVE, 2020).

In this research report, we describe what we call 'discourse' as a tactic, one of eight main modi operandi we identified by these actors. Here we see a strategic use of particular

language to disguise negative, bigoted, misogynist, or other forms of extremist messaging, by positioning them as positive. That means using certain words or terms and avoiding others. Specifically, human rights language is used to do so; examples of this tactic are described in the report presenting copied instructions taken from confidential leaked documents. In doing so, **extremist ideologies become part of regular, mainstream public debate**. Groups that these actors target, are often left feeling powerless or gaslit, not knowing how to argue against it. Certain right-wing extremist groups, such as 'Identitarian' groups, also use this tactic (RAN, 2021). They intentionally create confusion about their positions by contradicting themselves and clean up their image (ibid). Using humour and memes is a popular avenue to write things off as jokes; an important topic researched for the Handbook of Hate Memes (Textgain, 2022), a collection and study of hate memes commissioned by the European Commission. Or talking about topics such as migration, not by stating they are anti-immigration but rather in favour of 'remigration' which means sending immigrants back to the country or region they migrated from, meaning deportation.

An example of the intentional use of terms by an actor described in our report, is by the organisation CitizenGO. In 2019 they promoted a petition to protect 'parental rights' in California schools. They claimed that California schools are 'plagued' with **harmful sexual education** curricula and that parents' rights to determine how their children are educated about sex are eliminated. Here 'parental rights' are used rather than talking about anti-trans or anti comprehensive sexual education. Perhaps the most classic and well-known rephrase is 'pro-life rather than 'anti-abortion'. In doing so, the boundaries of which words we use to discuss issues and what is acceptable are pushed;

radical or extremist ideas are normalised as part of public debate.

Another tactic we describe in our report is networking. Seen on its own, this is a tactic employed by the actors in our report to further their interests. But when we put this tactic in the broader context of polarisation and extremism and look at the networks they are involved in, we can begin to understand it has an even more eroding effect on our democracies. **Specifically, ties with right-wing populist parties and extremist groups are relevant**. We see the same anti-LGBTIQ+ messages ('LGBTIQ+ propaganda'), the same goals to stop migration, to stop comprehensive sexual education in schools, limit women's free choice, and the anti-establishment, nationalist, and ethnic homogeneity promoting messages.

On 8 January 2022, Brazil saw the storming of government buildings by supporters of former President Bolsonaro. In its aftermath, experts have said that Bolsonaro has been very successful in connecting previously separate segments of the right; in Brazil, these are the 'evangelicals, the libertarians, the extremists', and uniting them by cleverly using digital media and messaging (Forbes, 2023). The relationships between the various segments on the right are not always kept secret. However, they may not always be obvious.

Elsewhere, we have found similar connections as the ones described around the events in Brazil. These range from the 6 January 2021 events in the US, the thwarted coup in Germany on 7 December 2022 and in the Netherlands. Here, ultra-(conservative) religious organisations exchange resources and/or tactics, and invite elected officials to endorse and speak at their events, and vice versa, providing each other with a platform, amplifying each other's messages through social media.

JfP recognises that globally, the actors investigated may not necessarily be factually linked or intertwined, and their tactics may differ and may be unaware of another's activities nor condone them.

JfP continuously researches subversive anti-democratic actors and activities and the relationship between these various right segments: the ultra-(conservative)religious, the populist right-wing parties (and politicians), and right-wing extremists. Our research and investigations focus on the **relationship between specific events** and how these events transpired, and who was involved. We make reconstructions to examine whether a formula can be found for other instances. For example, on 31 December 2022 as the new year was brought in on Dutch national television, texts were projected on the Erasmus Bridge in Rotterdam referring to the ideologies behind 'white lives matter' and 'generation identity' (NOS, 2023). The messages were later applauded on Twitter by the youth division of a populist right-wing political party in Dutch

parliament, the Forum for Democracy (Forum voor Democratie, FvD) (JFvD, 2023).

Our questions revolve around the relationship between this messaging, the (conspiracy) theories and resources they share, the actors involved in such messaging, and the (deliberate) subversion and polarisation that can be described as toxic. To assess whether the actors in our research are involved and to what extent, we will need to determine the units of measure. Such units of measure could be the **proximity to known polarising groups**, the reach of messaging and activities (on social media), closeness to influential actors, political support, legal aid, funding, and cohesion. We pay special attention to the kind of messaging or activity which might become dangerous or not, because not all should be considered a threat to our democracies but rather part of a healthy democracy (Dekker, 2022).

Our considerations refer where possible to (known) hate speech, conspiracy theories, dis/mis/malinformation.



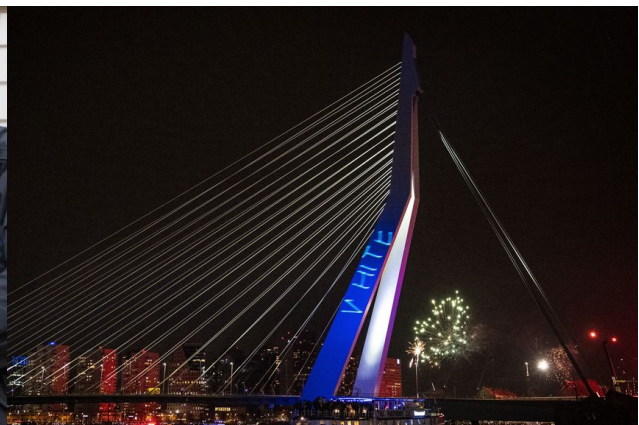
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Author Sergio Lima/AFP via Getty Images



Author Boris Roessler/dpa via AP



Author NAP

The Research

Most democracies pride themselves on being an open society and consider freedom of speech, association and religious freedom to be the cornerstones of a prosperous and fair country. While an open society ensures greater inclusivity and allows more people's voices to be heard, it does not come without risks. Especially, the **European Union provides a fertile ground for these movements to thrive due to its democratic nature**. This is not to say that open societies and freedoms are the problem, but rather that free and liberal democracies allow much liberty of free-speech, actors to network with one another, and influence the status quo. This is possible through spreading (dis)information through freedom of speech and association, funding, lobbying, networking with politicians and political parties (Ludwig, 2016).

One of these risks is that freedom of speech and religion, for instance, can be used to legitimise spreading hatred toward certain marginalised groups. In turn, freedom of association can establish extensive networks of like-minded people to afford more coordinated actions against specific issues. In the past decade, there has been an increased use of hate speech toward the LGBTIQ+ community and growing discussions of anti-women's rights on the agenda of different European countries (Berecz, & Devinat, 2017; Datta, 2018; Ahrens, Gaweda, & Kantola, 2021; Center for Reproductive Rights, 2021). This report will reveal how these hate speeches and growing discussions on our rights are not isolated incidents but are tools used as part of a more extensive agenda to grow power and influence.

Such an agenda is pushed by what we define in this report as the 'actors'. This term describes actors negatively **influencing** certain **human rights** through several subversive and coordinated activities. Such activities are provocative because they most often take place 'under the radar', are strictly speaking not illegal, and appear to be democratic at first sight. Due to their nature, these activities and these actors go almost unnoticed by using democratic system and its freedoms while posing a significant threat to the current status of our democracies on the

long term. Furthermore, these activities have been described as being coordinated because, while previous efforts to push a conservative agenda were primarily limited to local movements, they now share a much more international dimension (Biino, 2021). JfP recognises that the actors investigated may not necessarily be factually linked or intertwined, and their tactics may differ and may be unaware of another's activities nor condone them.

This report aims to raise awareness of these subversive activities in democratic countries. It focusses on actors in subversive networks and their methods, using examples from academia, journalists and human rights defenders who shared their knowledge. It includes activities from both **ideologically, politically** driven, and **financially incentivised subversive networks**.

This effort to bring to light and counter subversive powers is universal, though the primary focus of this project proposal focuses on the current dynamics in Europe. The various *modi operandi* these actors use to spread their agenda is explained. Some main actors identified will be discussed in detail, followed by a further identification of several smaller actors. **Recommendations** for improvement going forward will be addressed in the concluding section.

Subversion: Eight Tactics

Various tactics are used, but they serve the same purpose. We suggest that one reads these with the view that they are not stand-alone instruments but are complementary to one another. The fact that, taken alone, each of these tactics may appear 'harmless' indicates how subversive and under the radar these activities can be. When one understands the link between them and the number of people they resonate with, the situation becomes worrying. Our observations draw from a concise but not exhaustive review of existing research, our own open-source intelligence research, and interviews with several field experts.

We currently observe the following tactics: network, discourse, training, social media/internet, funding, infiltration of influential positions, attacks on human rights defenders and destruction of reputations. To illustrate the mechanism, consider the following sequence of events based on real cases where a conservative religious organisation opposes abortion.

Actors search and find allies to form or join an organisation. They develop **long-term strategies** including narratives that use specific words to create a story about how threatening is to allow abortion. One may think that, since in democracies there is freedom of speech, that organisation is just exercising such a right. However, imagine that, through international events, that organisation has the chance to network with other like-minded organisations. They then exchange their fundraising strategies, set up further meetings, and join forces to pool resources and share good practices and narratives. Meanwhile, they keep **feeding the growing sentiment and polarized debate** between everyday people using petitions and local populist-politicians. After some time, liberties taken for granted in any democracy are being doubted, and the level of polarisation in society grows. In a reasonable period, they set up different branches of that coalition across different countries and other local organisations decide to join. Thanks to the resource pooling and additional funding from American and Russian sources, they can

now afford high-class training on lobbying, SSLAPS, agenda-setting, and setting up a successful marketing campaign offline and on social media. Through the years, the network has grown, the funding as well, and they aim to send representatives to the **European Union** or the **United Nations** to start taking influential positions in governing bodies and committees. In relatively few years, they change the legal status of the organisation to a political party to benefit from tax advantages and state funding that go with it. Next step, the legal right to abortion law is being questioned and discussed in the parliaments of several different countries. In the long term, democratic liberties are questioned, taken to court, or discussed in parliament including with legislative proposals aimed at limiting these existing rights, and a high level of polarisation in society presents itself and existing rights overturned (*e.g. Roe v Wade*).

If the process followed was completely transparent and democratic, that should not raise an alert. However, that is not how it works our findings will demonstrate to the reader. These tactics were drawn from studying multiple real actors, activities, and events. These are typically organisations but can also be or have strong ties with or formed by political parties, political and religious figures, and other prominent persons. More information can be found in The Actors. This section will expand in detail upon each of the tactics.

Networking

'It is a spider web of extremism. It is the scariest network there is that is fundamentally trying to change democracies. It is an ugly network with money and power' (GPAHE, personal communication, 2022).

Perhaps the main tactic that the actors use is networking. They aim to hold different private meetings throughout the year, and manage to exchange information, pool resources - both economic knowledge - create new contacts, develop alliances, and coordinate anti-rights strategies, even on paper and signed by high-ranking officials across the globe (*in possession of JFP*). Every one of these organisations works together. Without networking, some organisations would not have been able to push their agenda so successfully. According to Suchanow (personal communication, 2022), one of the main reasons some of these organisations are so successful globally is that **they are all interconnected**. For example, Suchanow highlights the role of Russia, which in 2013 passed a law banning 'gay propaganda' to minors and signed a bill that banned the adoption of Russian children by same-sex couples abroad, inspiring and igniting discussions in other countries as well.

One prominent example is the World Congress of Families (WCF, see section 'The Actors' below). The main objective of the WCF is to develop and sustain a worldwide network of 'pro-family' (no same-sex marriage, against LGBTIQ+, against abortion, against self-determination, etc.) organisations. They aim to build an international movement that can influence and shape policy at the UN (Shameem, 2017). To achieve that goal, the WCF organises major international public events to unite leaders, organisations, and families to celebrate, affirm, and defend the natural family as the sole fundamental and sustainable unit of society (International Organization for the Family, n.d.).

In 2013, the now-sanctioned Russian billionaire Konstantin Malofeev spoke at the WCF, saying Russia should be seen as a model for the world (Searchlight, 2014). Malofeev has been tied to financing the Russian annexation of Crimea (Financial Times, 2014) and is sanctioned by the European Union and the US (US sanction numbers UKRAINE-EO13660; RUSSIA-EO14024). Malofeev had previously lauded that Christian Russia can help liberate the West from new liberal anti-Christian totalitarianism', speaking at the WCF VII in Sidney according to an attendee (ON LINE opinion, 2013). Speaking at another event in 2013 hosted by his St. Basil the Great Foundation, joined by others such as WCF President Brian and Fabrice Sorlin, Malofeev stated that 'Moscow is the center of their salvation' (Right Wing Watch Staff, 2014) and promotes the 'revival of **Russia as Great Orthodox Power** - Holy Russia'.

While this was unknown to the public at the time, in 2013 Ordo Iuris had just been established in Poland, founded by an organisation inspired by the TFP (Ordo Iuris, 2013; Piotr Skarga, 1999). The first time the public learned about Ordo Iuris, is in 2016, when they attempted to draft a bill with blanket abortion ban, that prohibits and criminalises abortion (Ordo Iuris, 2016; Suchanow, personal communication, 2022).

At the same time, in 2013, CitizenGO was established out of the Spanish organisation HazteOír. While these organisations had remained local before, they now aimed for a more global reach. And at that they have proven to be very successful with support from over 17,5 million people, lobbying in over 50 countries, and campaigning in 12

languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, German, Italian, Dutch, Hungarian, Slovenian, Croat, Russian and Polish).

Their board members are often part of multiple organisations. **Ignacio Arsuaga**, for example, is the founder of HazteOír and CitizenGO and, simultaneously on the board of directors of the Political Network for Values (PNfV) and a speaker and organiser of the WCF. **Brian Brown**, the chair of the International Organization for the Family (IOF), is also on the board of CitizenGO and PNfV. Of the latter, their former president and strong partner of several Russian oligarchs (FSSPX News, 2022), **Katalin Novak**, is now the president of Hungary, promoting the party line 'LGBT+ propaganda targets kindergartens and schools', she stated in an interview, denying homosexual people any right whatsoever to raise children (FSSPX, 2022).

Another targeted group are migrant communities. The PNfV website promotes a statement adopted on 13 May 2021 by the family ministers of the Visegrád Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) on their commitment to family values. Miss Novak explains that jointly they 'have entered into a cooperation centered around families' and search 'for the solutions to our demographic challenges in the support of families rather than migration' (PNfV, 2021).

Ignacio Arsuaga, the founder of HazteOír and CitizenGO, has been developing a strategy to establish a consolidated network of international conservatives worldwide for many years. Examples of Arsuaga speaking at WCF congresses and being promoted (on the WCF website), are ample, starting as early as 2012 (WCF 2019; WCF 2022, 2019, National Civic Council 2012). This constant networking feeds the political polarisation that has become a real problem for many European democracies (Biino, 2021). JfP recognises that the actors investigated may not necessarily

be factually linked or intertwined, their tactics may differ and they may be unaware of another's activities nor condone them.

Similar to (extreme) right winged populist politicians, some of these organisations have clear ties with the Russian elite, the Kremlin, and oligarchs. For instance, **Alexey Komov** (a Russian national) is a board member of CitizenGO and also the World Congress of Families representative in Russia (CitizenGo; WCF 2019, see also the chapter on actors in this report). He works for the **Russian ultra-orthodox oligarch Malofeev**, an ally of Putin (FOIA research, 2019). Malofeev and Komov are connected to various facets of Russian politics and exert significant influence in the Russian media, including with their channel *TsargradTV*.

Komov and Malofeev have been reported as being involved in supporting - or, as some would have it, influencing - European politicians. Malofeev is allegedly responsible for a multi-million Euro loan' to French **Marine Le Pen's** Front National (now known as Rassemblement National), with Komov for payments to Salvini, the then rising star in Italian politics, and directly manipulating politicians from **Austria, Germany, and Lithuania** (New Line Magazine, 2022; RFI, 2015). In September 2014, Le Pen was reported to have met with Alexander Babakov, a senator from Putin's United Russia party who advises him on cooperation with Russian organisations abroad. Babakov was reportedly behind a €9 million Russian loan granted to the FN that year (EU Observer, 2017). He is on an EU sanctions list and is believed to own hidden assets in France worth €11 million. Marine Le Pen reportedly also met Konstantin Malofeev (EU Observer 2017; UAWIRE 2017). Malofeev reportedly supported the Front National in obtaining a **€2 million loan** (EU Observer, 2017; RFI, 2014). Le Pen's former adviser Chauprade who was present at the discussion with Babakov described it to a

French tv-channel as 'a thank-you meeting for the loan, which was used to fund the EU elections campaign' (EU Observer, 2017).

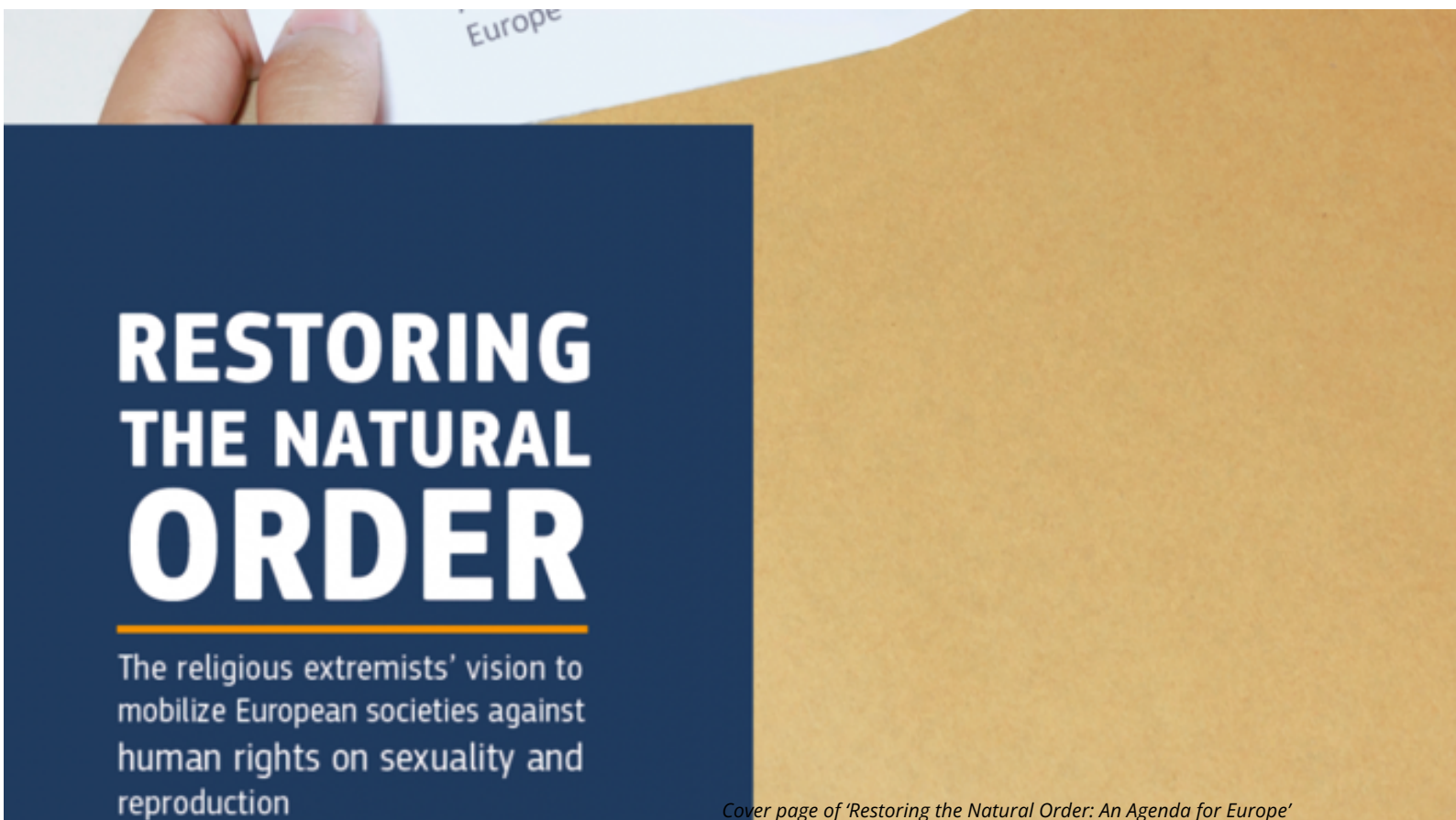
Autocracy and soft power, for the past three decades, have gone hand in hand.

The last decade has proven that populist and illiberal forces in the democratic West are vulnerable to policies undertaken by illiberal autocratic regimes. In the eyes of Russian policy-makers, the demographic decline in Russia and the world, pose an existential threat to the current world order. An increase in civil rights for sexual and gender minorities would only reinforce this demographic trend in their views (Bonny, 2019).

Another initiative and network of anti-gender organisations and individuals is Agenda Europe, which has been described as actively undermining LGBTBIQ+ and women's rights in Europe (Norris, 2021). This network emerged in 2013 as an anonymous blog aimed at

strategising 'achievable goals' to roll back human rights in Europe since 2013: an 'Agenda for Europe, which seeks to overturn existing laws on basic human rights related to sexuality and reproduction' (EPF, 2018). It quickly became a well-organized network that organised meetings and annual summits and even created a secret but eventually leaked manifesto entitled '**Restoring the Natural Order: An Agenda for Europe**', which revealed its mission and worldview (Datta, 2018). Various organisations described in this report appear to be connected to this secret network.

Leaked documents show Agenda Europa's board numbered about 100-150 individuals (including many political leaders, government officials and religious representatives from across Europe) and at least 50 conservative organizations (Wikipedia, n.d.).



Cover page of 'Restoring the Natural Order: An Agenda for Europe'

Discourse

“Language is very important to them. They try to introduce a special vocabulary and twist the language to their interest” (K. Suchanow, personal communication, 2022).

According to Shameem (in Whyte, 2017), ‘the focus of what they do is power oriented; manipulation of religious arguments to increase power and undermine the universality of rights’.

What is meant by using ‘language’ and ‘discourse’ as a tactic is that, by **changing the narrative**, the actors can change the frame of thought on specific topics. They take advantage of existing rights characteristic of a democratic society and twist them. It is, after all, their right to speak up (freedom of speech) about their ideologies. Nevertheless, the line between hate speech and the right to speak your opinion is fragile.

One commonly used way of doing so is by switching from negative to positive language. In that way, they **legitimise their agenda** and influence people’s feelings on sensitive topics

by creating resentment toward specific social issues (Datta, 2021). Such a sense of grievance can reinforce polarisation in societies and politicise human rights that we usually take for granted. They often combine positive language with misleading discourses about human rights.

For example, they take existing human rights and build new interpretations of them to justify the very human rights abuses. Finally, they also promote “new” human rights to overthrow existing ones and create a new narrative that portrays the opposition as a threat to these ‘brand-new’ human rights, **spreading a sense of urgency** and intolerance towards opposing groups.

These narratives are usually combined with disinformation and **provoke fear** and uncertainty. With regards to LGTBQ+ and women’s rights, Shameem (2017, 2021) has identified several narratives used by actors that aim to fight these groups and promote their agenda: ‘gender ideology, ‘parental rights and protection of children, ‘right to life, ‘protection of the family, ‘religious freedom’, and ‘freedom of speech.

b) list of euphemistic terminology

How they call it	What it is
Rainbow families	broken-up families
Patchwork families	broken-up families
Freedom of choice	Freedom to kill; i.e. the State fails to protect those who are in greatest need for protection, namely unborn children
Brain death	A status where brain functions appear to have ceased, but where the person concerned is still alive. Potentially, this status can last several months.
Equal treatment of homosexuals	Privileges for homosexuals
Reproductive rights	Free abortion
Homosexual love	Sodomy

129

Clipping taken from confidential manifesto to restore natural order

A closer look at the use of language and discourse can be found in a dedication chapter in this report.

Training

The subversive tactics are more often than not informed via training and meetings where the exchange of know-how and good practices happens. Like networking, training is a tactic actors use to coordinate their strategies, actions, and narratives.

They usually involve negotiation skills, legal counselling, and money management for successful campaigning (Suchanow, personal communication, 2022). Marketing strategies are also taught, and arguably, the coordinated language we have observed across these actors and countries results from that. Sometimes the pieces of training are preliminary to global events, such as the **United Nations** Commission on the Status of Women conference, and they take the form of workshops on 'how to influence the public process or 'how do decision-making procedures' work (Shameem, 2021; Suchanow, personal communication, 2022). They also involve professional fundraising and political activism workshops (Datta, 2021).

In the case of the anti-LGBTIQ+ and anti-women's rights groups, a key actor that provides training is the US right-wing school Leadership Institute (Suchanow, personal communication, 2022). The primary formation is on topics such as gender ideology, how to prevent attacks against marriage and the family, how Christians are persecuted in the East, and how to counter-attack the violation of 'freedom of opinion' in the West. According to Shameem (2021), CitizenGO organised multiple training pieces via the Leadership Institute in 2017, 2018, and 2019. These were held in camps or four-day gatherings, where CitizenGO hosted individuals from Europe and abroad.

Other organisations use training formats which are similar to The Leadership Institute's training format. Through **leaked documents**, we obtained a presentation from the Political Networks for Values board meeting on 21 January 2016 (image next page).

In the forum, different objectives are identified and prioritised. The first goals indicated concern around preventing and banning other existing policies by **rival organisations** (e.g., de-fund IPPF, surrogacy of motherhood, reverse changes on marriage definition, ban abortion, conscientious objection rights, ...). Other strategic priorities concern **taking influential positions with the UN, the EU and the Council of Europe** e.g. by obtaining training from people who used to work in these institutions (see figure below). The documents also included a plan to **expand the influence** of the organisation (e.g., incorporation of new members and countries, formalisation of new alliances, ...), how to prepare agenda proposals, how to monitor the status of 'protection of life, marriage and fundamental freedoms in Europe', and the civil networks to be approached for a coalition.

The Political Network for Values often holds monthly **members-only** webinars and yearly summits that take place globally. They cover various topics ranging from 'Political support for motherhood; what is at stake' to 'The Future of Christian Democratic Values in the European Union'. A recent example of one of their summits is a conference in Budapest from 26 May to 27 May 2022. The summit was titled 'Freedom at stake; Building and strengthening a pro-freedom agenda globally'. The program claims to address the intrinsic relationship between freedom and human dignity in the face of contemporary challenges. The summit was sponsored by various well-known and like-minded ultra-conservative advocacy groups that this research covers, such as; the International Organization for the Family, Family Watch International and CitizenGO. (Political

Network for Values, n.d.). This is noteworthy because the result of this summit was a gathering of almost 200 world leaders from more than 30 different countries, where the president of PNFV; José Antonio Kast, made a call to action “to fight the political, cultural and social battle with the conviction that it is our principles that generate progress and social welfare.” (Redacción, 2022). This is another clear example of the broad outreach and vast connections between these conservative advocacy groups below and above the radar.

The Political Network for Values not only reaches others through webinars and summits but also through a youth training

programs which they have developed. Here, young people are taught how the summit's internal and external functioning and managing are performed (Political Network for Values, n.d.). They then attend the conferences and have access to communicate with various world leaders, all with similar anti- LGBTIQ+ and anti-women’s rights views.

These training programs teach these ideologies to young people, which is an effective way of ensuring that their doctrines and principles are spread not just amongst themselves but have a wider reach amongst youths outside of their usual circle.

Fostering a political Agenda worldwide on life, family, freedom...

– **Prioritize Topics:**

- **De-fund IPPF:** legal and political work supported by civil society campaigns
- **Surrogacy** of motherhood: prevention and legislation
- **Marriage:** prevent and/or reverse changes on definition
- **Abortion:** 1-prevent / 2-restrict / 3-ban
- **Euthanasia** and assisted suicide: 1-prevent / 2-ban
- **Family:** language and good proposals for national policy plans and laws
- **Parent’s rights** on children’s education: language and legislative proposals
- **Conscientious objection** rights: legal and political action
- **Religious freedom**

– **Define Actions** at the different levels (global / local):

- **Global:** UN
- **Regional:** OAS, CARICOM, EU, Council of Europe, African Union, Pan-Pacific
- **Local:** Governments and local administrations; National Parliaments...



Example slide taken from leaked strategy documents Political Network for Values 2016

Social media/internet

Another tool that actors use to promote their agenda is social media and the internet, to spread narratives using misleading language and disinformation. The internet is used primarily to mobilise its audiences to support campaigns and sign petitions. However, actors increasingly use the online world to promote their activities, convey their message, and build a following across different communities.

The examples are ample, like one that CitizenGo started in 2021 in **Kenya** to 'defend the lives of the unborn', and one against the United Nations to 'stop the United Nations from corrupting our children' because 'the UN is outright against us' for the 2023 Commission on the Status of Women (CitizenGo, 2021; CitizenGo 2023). The petitions are still open for signatures.



CitizenGo campaigning in Kenya (2021)

The **internet and social media have made it extremely easy** for these organisations to promote their ideologies globally. They obtain a broader reach by using a wide variety of platforms – such as websites, Instagram, or Twitter accounts – in multiple languages. Eventually, by feeding emotions of the public, these tools offer an efficient way to influence decision-makers like politicians, media, and businesspeople, who often amplify these messages and emotions by re-publishing these messages, leading to their ultimate goal: support for and success of their priorities.

Even though these tactics may seem harmless at first, they generate toxic polarisation, hate, and sometime ignite off-line violence. Furthermore, the narratives and tactics used are usually misleading and non-transparent.

In the case of LGBTIQ+ and women's rights opposing groups, they present themselves as protectors of family, life and freedom. At the same time, behind this façade is a harmful political agenda that is dangerous to the democratic process (Ramsay and Provos, 2019). For example, CitizenGO aims to 'effectively influence national governments, parliaments, and international institutions, from the grassroots' (CitizenGO, n.d.). As Mario Velasco, CitizenGO's volunteer spokesperson, declares: 'the internet is providing us with a tool, which is not good or bad. But we have the moral duty to use it for good, which is our main goal' (Whyte, 2017). The organisation has launched two petitions firmly against Spain's proposed trans-rights law. The petitions caught much attention and collected over 18.000 signatures in six days (Biino, 2021). In 2021, CitizenGO was campaigning against the Matic Report, a motion to promote sexual and reproductive healthcare in the European Union. It also demanded that the toy company Lego stop producing LGBTIQ+ sets (Norris, 2021).

CitizenGO has also tried to influence the public discourse on topics that serve its agenda leading to physical danger. According to a report by the Mozilla Foundation, in 2020 and 2021, they had paid people to **spread disinformation** on reproductive health in Kenya. The results show how efforts were made to manipulate Twitter's Trends to shape public discourse. Kenyan researcher Odanga Madungo analysed 20.811 tweets and found eleven campaigns likely fed by CitizenGO. They pushed ten hashtags, many containing health disinformation. Madungo also discovered that CitizenGO paid people to

post tweets. They received content and instructions over WhatsApp (Mureithi, 2022). CitizenGO uses the internet and the opportunities of social media platforms as their primary tool to influence public discourse.

Almunda Cabezas, a geopolitics professor, argues that 'these groups create media spaces where their discourse travels fast and generates a lot of action and hate. They replicate campaigns and agendas so that rights are no longer rights, they become opinions' (Biino, 2021).

CitizenGO also operates as a membership platform to increase funding, engagement, and profile. The platform is estimated to raise around 40.000 euros monthly through **member donations**. The platform offers online campaigns in over ten languages (Obst, 2020; Shameem, 2017).

Funding

'Finance is their strongest suit; although it is unclear how much money circulates across these networks, it has been estimated to amount to some billions of euros' (Bonny, personal communication, 2022).

CitizenGO claims to be funded by 'small online donations' only (CitizenGO, n.d.). However, leaked documents revealed quite the contrary. CitizenGO has strong ties to many Christian far-right organisations and Russian oligarchs. Research shows that the founder of CitizenGO, Arsuaga, approached possible donors (affluent far-right influencers) to gather seed funding (Datta, 2021). Their initial funding is **linked to the Vatican, Russian oligarchs, the US Christian right, and Luca Volontè** (an Italian politician sentenced to four years in prison for money laundering and accepting bribes) (Datta, 2021).

Most of the time, these organisations appear to have little funding and limited resources. This allows them to stay under the radar

One of the International Organization for the Family (IOF) projects, aside from the World Congress of Families, is iFamNews. This intends to build the most significant global pro-family and pro-life news outlet. It is published in several languages, which include Italian, Spanish, French, German, Russian and Serbian. iFamNew is growing by the day and becoming a leader in the pro-family, pro-marriage, and pro-life news territory (International Family News, n.d.).

Also, besides webinars, summits and a training program, the Political Network for Values has an active social media presence, e.g., on Twitter, YouTube channel, Instagram, Facebook page and Flickr account. On these social media accounts, PNfV often talk about current events and share their ideologies in multiple languages; they also use these platforms to promote their webinars and summits.

without catching massive attention and disguising the economic power that one may think they have. However, through the network they have been gradually building, it can be seen that this is not the case. Third-party research indicates that extensive links and economic ties are used to support these organisations and activities in a somewhat interconnected way, making these actors more robust and powerful (Bonny, 2019; Datta, 2021; Nardelli, 2021; Geoghegan, n.d.).

Different works identify **Russian oligarchs and the US Christian Right** as the leading providers of money for other actors engaged in promoting anti-women and anti-LGBTIQ+ communities (Bonny, 2019; Nardelli, 2021; Geoghegan, n.d.). Specifically, Bonny 's work (2019) argues that Russian oligarchs and

conservative activists have strong financial and political ties with European actors. While focusing specifically on the Russian-Hungarian connections, the author describes how an email leak conducted by the Russian hacker group Shaltai Boltai revealed intensive links between the WCF and conservative Russian activists and oligarchs, such as Konstantin Malofeev and Vladimir Yakunin.

Bonny reports the annual budget of the WCF and its related organisations to amount to roughly **216 million dollars**, despite that they declare their budget to be 500.000 dollars. Moreover, leaked emails also revealed how these oligarchs have often been invited to EU-funded conferences with MEPs and European ministers and how participants got their travel paid by the Foundation of St. Andrew the First Called, the foundation run by Yakunin's spouse (Bonny, 2019).

Nardelli (2021) also writes about an 'oil deal' that happened in October 2020 between five Russians and Matteo Salvini, leader of La Lega Italian political party; the deal was meant to channel tens of millions of dollars from Russian oil revenues to Salvini's political party. Not shockingly, Sonne (2018) describes the 9.4 million loan that the French politician Marine Le Pen received from a secretive Russian bank for her election campaign. According to Bonny (personal communication, 2022), the contact between Le Pen and these Russian oligarchs happened at the WCF. Geoghegan (n.d.) talks about how US conservatives fund Italian clinics that offer free counselling for pregnant women to not having an abortion and promising financial support if they decide not to terminate their pregnancy. The total amount estimated to reach Europe is around **180 million dollars from Russia and 80 million dollars from the US** (Claire Provost Tatev Hovhannisyan et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, most of the money that funds these actors does not come from the US or

Russia but from Europe itself (Claire Provost, Tatev Hovhannisyan et al., 2021). For example, Datta (2021) describes various actors, their funding, and how the money circulates among them. We can also identify four main channels typically used to raise such financing: astroturfing, tapping into social and economic elites, state funding, and religious networks.

1. The term '**astroturfing**' describes the practice of masking the sponsors, a message or organisation (e.g., political, advertising, religious or public relations) to make it appear as though it originates from and is supported by grassroots participants (Merriam Webster, n.d.). In this case it also consists of creating different fundraising campaigns set up under various organisations' names (although they belong to the same) and with different themes. It has been described as a two-step process. First, the actors create separate petitions on various issues which are politicised. This way, it creates social resentment while gathering information on supporters.

For instance, Tradition Family and Property (TFP) branches 'run several campaigns simultaneously', such as 'one on abortion, another on pornography and a third on traditional Catholic rituals' (Datta, 2021). These petitions use different topics to appeal to other sectors of society and maximise profit due to their appeal for donations next to signatures. While doing that, the actors manage to set up significant databases of potential donors, which are then contacted by 'different' organisations sharing similar views. CitizenGo for example has over 17,6 million active supporters.

Second, the signatories are targeted with mass mailing requesting donations and unrequested 'gifts' such as rosaries, literature, and religious objects. Once the donations are received, all that money becomes untaxed revenue, and supporters'

data is shared among the different branches of the same organisation. In this way, the actor ensures that donors do not feel they are sending their money to a single entity but to many different entities (Datta, 2021). The profit is then invested in real estate and the setting up of new branches across Europe (Datta, 2021). This technique is employed by CitizenGO and Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) but is mainly used by TFP, which we know has various organisations that are active in Europe, such as in the Netherlands, Poland, and Croatia, Estonia, Lithuania, Hungary and Slovakia.

2. The second channel is **'tapping into social and economic elites'**, which also consists of fundraising, but in a more 'traditional' manner. In fact, by promoting both religious extremism and economic hyper-libertarianism, the actors gain support from two crucial sectors of society. The first is the old clerical-aristocratic network, consisting of individuals who usually have high inheritance and aristocratic descendants and traditionally support the Church and its related values (Datta, 2021). These people want to maintain the status quo and fear losing money or power (Suchanow, personal communication, 2022). The second is a network of wealthy individuals that support the hyper-libertarianism rhetoric and often participate in significant fundraising events. They also support far-right political parties in different European countries, and some sponsor events like the WCF (Datta, 2021).

3. The **'state funding'** channel works by using institutionalised subsidy mechanisms. State funding is retrieved because they form new non-governmental organisations or set up

civil society groups that advocate for anti-women and anti-LGBTIQ+ rights (Datta, 2021). An example is the Dutch Christian organization NPV-Care for Life, receiving state sponsorship to promote their work fighting against abortion, transgenders, and self-determination as this would be incompatible with the Bible (NPV Zorg, 2021.). These organisations and civil society groups are usually engaged in areas like limiting women's right to abortion and setting up outreach programmes to engage the youth population with their ideologies. Perhaps most strikingly, sometimes, these organisations transform themselves into political parties to receive public funding and the tax advantages related to that status (Datta, 2021).

As we will explain below, the actors work their way into gaining a 'legal status' that allows them to receive financial aid from their respective governments. Sometimes, they manage to receive financial assistance at the European Union and United Nations levels.

4. Finally, the money is also raised by traditional **'religious networks'** like the Catholic, the Protestant, and the Orthodox Church, which use their special status and cross-border presence to enter the political arena, promote their values and facilitate mobilisation toward anti-women and anti-LGBTIQ+ rights (Datta, 2021, pp. 66-69). Their financial support, however, only accounts for a fraction of these actors' net worth.

Throughout these four channels, the various actors and networks have managed to raise 437.7 million US dollars from Europe alone (Datta, 2021).

Infiltration of Influential Positions

Another tactic is the penetration of crucial official positions in international organisations, institutions, and committees. This allows them to promote their agenda at the UN level (Shameem, 2021) and at the European level (GPAHE, personal communication, 2022 and GPAHE, 2021). In 2009, Russia made a lobbying move to promote its agenda through the launch of 'Promoting Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms through a Better Understanding of Traditional Values' at the UN Human Rights Council. The initiative was supposed to be up for discussing female genital mutilation, but soon after, an anti-LGBTQ+ rights rhetoric emerged showing the true nature (Bonny, 2019).

The WCF holds consultative status at the **Economic and Social Council** (ECOSOC). It works globally to promote policies that question women's reproductive rights and current LGBTIQ+ rights (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d; United Nations, n.d.).

In the Council of Europe, organisations like Ordo Iuris and CitizenGO have representatives who actively participate in discussions concerning children's and family rights (GPAHE, personal communication, 2022). In 2019, Ordo Iuris presented a report at the **Council of Europe**. It was used to frame Norway's institution Barnevernet as infringing family rights because a mother was refused custody of her child after allegations against her were found (Ordo Iuris, n.d.). Furthermore, Ordo Iuris has gained government support from Poland (GPAHE, personal communication, 2022). At the European level, Ordo Iuris enjoys the right to submit third party interventions both at the **European Court of Human Rights** and at

the **European Committee of Social Rights** (Ordo Iuris, 2019). Similarly, the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) has been allowed to submit third party interventions before the **European Court of Human Rights** (GPAHE, 2021).

CitizenGO has been utilising the US-style Super PAC model of political campaigning to channel its funding for supporting the far-right VOX party in Spain, both at the national and the European level (Gabai, 2022). At the UN level, it has participated at multiple gatherings of the **UN Commission on the Status of Women** (CWS), claiming that the UN solution to climate change cannot be to legalise abortion, promote gender ideology or 'the sexualization of children' (CitizenGO, 2022). At the CWS in 2019, CitizenGO was allowed to drive around the UN campus with a bus displaying a fetus. During the gathering, the organisation admitted to **doxing a Kenyan ambassador** (Equite Forward, n.d.).

Attacks on Rights Defenders

The last tactic this report covers is the attack on rights defenders.

Although attacks on human rights defenders have not been mentioned by previous literature, it is undeniably a tactic some actors use to slow and repress the fight for and defence of fundamental human rights necessary for an effective democratic society. Information gathered from interviews conducted with human rights defenders

shows that the most common form of attack against them by actors is through social media threats by individuals or troll farms and physical violence. When interviewing Klementina Suchanow, Co-Founder of All-Poland Women's Strike, she told us that an activist's life is not without threats and that social media hate is often directed toward

her. (Suchanow, personal communication, 2022). Suchanow stated that she has also experienced bomb threats, social media trolls, physical interventions and police violence. Attacks like these have left her and other human rights defenders with trauma, PTSD, burn-out and bodily injury. (Suchanow, personal communication, 2022). The level of danger varies per country. The threats he

faces most often are **death threats and the threat of being hunted**. (Bonny, personal communication, 2022). However, Bonny also said he gets protection “as an outsider with western privilege”. Bonny also acknowledged that not everyone is afforded these privileges, which is why he finds it essential to be vocal in defending LGBTIQ+ rights.

Reputational Harm

When it comes to LGBTIQ+ and women's rights, vocal advocates are often the target of threats and discourage activities through means that do not directly include threats to their personal (bodily) safety. The forms of reputational harm we observe for this report are SLAPPs, interventions before national or European Courts, and the spreading of disinformation.

Harming or destroying a target's reputation is a tactic that can effectively intervene against a journalist, activist, or advocacy organisation. It may present itself in different forms, depending on the target and the availability of resources to actors. Here we describe a few well-reported cases to illustrate the **adversity human rights defenders, politicians and rights advocates face**.

In 2021 the European Parliament passed a resolution on sexual reproductive health rights (SRHR) and women's rights, in which safe access to legal abortion is recognised as a human right (European Parliament, 2021). The lead Member of the European Parliament (MEP), Predrag Fred Matić, received intense threats, both offline (having dolls sent to his office, Politico 2021) and online, for his role in the resolution and to stop the resolution from passing. Ordo Iuris launched a petition to stop the passing of the resolution under the title ‘Stop the Matić Report’ (Ordo Iuris, n.d.), directly targeting the MEP himself. European Parliamentary Forum (EPF) for Sexual and Reproductive Rights lead author Neil Datta has found himself the subject of lawsuits in Poland from Ordo Iuris after publishing his report on the financing of anti-

abortion campaigns in the EU by ‘religious extremist funders’ (Datta, 2021, Ordo Iuris, n.d.). A Polish human rights defender, Bart Staszewski, an advocate for LGBTIQ+ rights and a documentary filmmaker, was sued after he had done a public campaign on LGBTIQ+ rights in ‘LGBT free zones’ and faced 20 police investigations. The lawsuits were not successful but had a massive impact on the work of Staszewski (ILGA-Europe, RoL 2022). SLAPPs have been reported to have a particularly intimidating effect on rights defenders rather than their portrayed objectives of rectification (ILGA-Europe, RoL, 2022). Smear campaigns are reported in Hungary, Poland, and Slovenia (ILGA-Europe, RoL, 2022). At the same time, **dis/mis/mal-information** is also seen across the EU, with narratives portraying LGBTQ+ rights as ‘colonialism by the liberal West’, ‘a threat to child safety’ because of ‘paedophilia’, with Russia and the World Congress of Families named as actors behind this (European Parliament, 2021). The latter spread disinformation that EU school books teach masturbation (European Parliament, 2021). These means allow for an atmosphere of hate, acceptable bigoted speech, and the normalisation of these narratives in mainstream politics.

The Actors

This section will outline four out of the many different actors that we have researched for this report: the World Congress of Families (WCF), CitizenGO, Political Network for Values (PNV), and Tradition, Family and Property (TFP). Many actors can be categorised as anti-rights or subversive for this report and we only present a small selection of the extensive overview in this report. A choice had to be made. Therefore, some global actors, such as the Alliance Defending Freedom, are described more briefly in this report, despite their international activities and incredible influence. The report also discusses other influential organisations and networks active in Europe. All of these deserve further investigation to uncover the vastness of the networks, individuals and funding supporting them in the background.

World Congress of Families & International Organization for the Family

The International Organization for the Family (IOF) was previously named The Howard Centre of Family and it hosts the World Congress of Families (WCF) as a program. It was founded by John A. Howard in 1976 as a non-denominational group whose agenda is protecting the 'natural family'. Through the frame of the 'natural family' they promote a sole and strict view, which consists of the traditional household, based exclusively on the marriage between one heterosexual woman and one heterosexual man and their biological children, excluding any alternative type of family. Through their network they connect amongst others American and Russian powerhouses.



Depicted Brian Brown © Southern Poverty Law Center, 2019

The group also promotes adhering to strict binary gender roles, which entails that men serve as the head of the households and women as their spouses and bearers of

children. According to WCF, only this type of family can put an end to the 'demographic winter', implying the idea that European populations, specifically, are

in decline as a result of abortion, feminism, homosexuality, women in the workplace, and many other things that deviate from the concept of the 'natural family' (Clifford Bob, 2012). They've built a transnational coalition to promote the natural family to the world by creating one of their most significant projects, the World Congress of Families.

The WCF is an international conference that usually lasts four days and hosts different types of organisations, political leaders, and religious leaders (Bonny, 2019; Chen, 2015). The president of the WCF is Brian Brown, an activist against same-sex marriage, abortion, and anti-LGBTIQ+ rights (Political Research Associates, 2018). The **World Congress of Families** started as an academic and activist pro-family movement and is **increasingly becoming an agenda setter** in the wider, international conservative movement (R. Bonny, personal communication, 2022). It holds consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and is in different local groups and governments worldwide (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.).

The first conference was held in 1997 in Prague, hosting around 700 participants. It was then organised 13 times more in cities like Amsterdam, Madrid, and most recently in Mexico (October 2022). These are well

attended with over 9.000 attendees with representatives from political movements, the Vatican at Archbishop level, influencers, and aristocrats from e.g. Germany (WCF, 2022). In 2019 WCF descended upon Verona, Italy, where it starred Giorgia Meloni as one of its prime speakers; the WCF was pleased to have hosted the new Prime Minister of Italy (IOF 2019).

The World Congress of Families has 50.000 individual partners and 42 partner organisations (WCF, 2017). The type of partners they support share views regarding same-sex marriage, the 'traditional family' as the union of heterosexual females and heterosexual men, and anti-abortion stances. Examples are TFP, CitizenGO, HazteOír, Novae Terrae Foundation, ProVita, Alive to the World, Family First Foundation, UptoFaith, and the Worldwide Organization For Women (WCF Regional and Global Conferences, n.d.). Their speakers are usually religious leaders, motivational speakers, and academic figures worldwide (Chen, 2015).

Through the years, it has proven to be an optimal way of creating, maintaining, and growing a massive network of like-minded organisations, many of which seek to restrict LGBTIQ+ and woman's rights under the guise of the defence of the 'natural family' (Bonny, 2019; Chen, 2015; Southern Poverty Law, n.d.; Geoghegan, n.d.).

CitizenGO and HazteOír

HazteOír was founded in 2001 by Ignacio Arsuaga in Madrid (Obst, 2020). Their website shows HazteOír's full name: 'Make Yourself Heard, victims of the gender ideology'. In 2019 the Spanish Ministry of the Interior withdrew the organisation's declaration of public interest (its charity status obtained in May 2013) because the government had ruled that HazteOír had taken actions that could be considered attacks against certain groups of people. The government was referring to a HazteOír's bus that had toured Spain, displaying a portrait of Adolf Hitler wearing a cap with a 'feminist symbol' alongside the hashtag **#StopFeminazis** and the slogan 'repeal the gender laws' (Shameem, 2021).



© Martinez (2021)

To reach a wider audience, Arsuaga found it necessary to expand its scope of action internationally, hence the foundation of CitizenGO. CitizenGO emerged from the Spanish anti-LGBTIQ+ and pro-family organisation HazteOír in 2013. CitizenGO (a partner of the WCF) is one of the most influential ultra-conservative religious advocacy groups worldwide that, in its own words, aims 'to defend and promote life, family and liberty'. They also claim that they work to ensure that 'those in power respect human dignity and individuals' rights' (CitizenGO, n.d.). This Christian organisation 'demands' respect for the right to life 'from the moment of conception to its natural end'; the right to 'marriage, understood as the union between one man and one woman' and the right to 'religious freedom', among other things (CitizenGO, 2013). They oppose abortion, same-sex marriage, and transgender identity (Biino, 2021).

CitizenGo primarily uses online petitions to push their anti-abortion and anti-LGBTIQ+ agenda. It promotes these petitions in around fifty countries worldwide and claims to have millions of supporters (Political Research Associates, 2018). The promotion of petitions has been recognised as an essential

tool for managing its rights-restricting campaigns in several European countries, such as Italy, Hungary, and Poland. Their website has been translated into over ten languages (Obst, 2020).

CitizenGO is linked to other ultra-conservative organisations, such as the World Congress of Families (WCF). Leaders of **both groups frequently meet** to share insights on campaigns and lobbying efforts. Arsuaga (leader of CitizenGO) has often spoken during WCF events (for example: SPLC, 2016). CitizenGO is also affiliated with the Spanish political extreme right party Vox, which shares similar ideas on LGBTIQ+ and women's rights (Biino, 2021). A third-party source reports that leaked documents show a link between CitizenGO and El Yunque, an ultra-right Mexican and Spanish Catholic secret society mobilised to 'defend the Catholic religion and fight the forces of Satan through violence and murder' (according to investigative journalist Alvaro Delgado) (Whyte, 2017). **El Yunque, their existence often denied**, aims to defend the Catholic religion from its adversaries: communism, the Jewish people and Freemasonry. They also use subversive methods to achieve their goals.

Political Network for Values

Like the WCF, the Political Network for Values (PNfV) is an organisation that holds summits for like-minded actors worldwide. It was first established in Spain and began at the initiative of Jaime Mayor Oreja, the former Spanish Minister of the Interior. PNfV describes itself as ‘a global platform and a resource for legislators and political representatives rooted in a Trans-Atlantic dialogue on shared values’. These values are rooted in their belief that the dignity of a human person is an ethical value of a universal and transcultural character (PNfV, n.d.).

In December 2014, they held their first Transatlantic Summit in the **headquarters of the United Nations**, in collaboration with various legislators from Europe, the United States and Mexico. The Political Network for Values has board members and directors from over 20 countries, including Mexico, Spain, USA, Kenya, Chile, Hungary, Norway, Slovakia, Poland, Guatemala, Argentina, Ecuador, Uruguay, Brazil, Dominican Republic and Ireland (PNfV 2022).

Like all bigger players in this eco-system, the Political Network for Values is connected to many other actors involved in ultra-conservative groups mentioned throughout this report, as they are members of the Board of Directors of PNfV, such as Ignacio Arsuaga, who is the president of CitizenGO and Brian Brown, who is the president of the WCF. Additional influential people on the PNfV's Board of Directors include; Lola Velarde, who is the Director of United Nations Affairs at the Institute for Family Policy, Benjamin Bull, at one time the Executive Director of Alliance Defending Freedom International (ADFI) and Sharon Slater, the president of Family Watch International.

PNfV hosts yearly Transatlantic Summits, for example at the headquarters of the United Nations in New York in 2014, followed by others including at the **European Parliament** in Brussels in 2017, in the Capitol of Colombia Bogota, in 2019, and in Budapest May 2022, in addition to other regional meetings. In Budapest there were multiple

confirmed speakers with highly influential positions in other ultra-conservative organisations and members of various parliaments (PNfV, n.d.). Confirmed speakers included Ignacio Arsuaga from CitizenGO, Sharon Slater, President of Family Watch International, Amy Sinclair Member of the **US Senate**, Angela Gandra, State Secretary for the Family in Brazil, Christian Alting von Geusau (NL), Rector of the ITI Catholic University in Austria and connected to the renowned Dutch **Clingendael Institute**, Gudrun Kugler **member of parliament of Austria**, and Lórinca Nasca, member of parliament of Hungary, Jaime Mayor Oreja, Spanish Former **Minister of Home Affairs**, multiple Members of **European Parliament**, actor **Mel Gibson** amongst many other influential actors (PNfV, n.d.).

The main ideologies that the Political Network for Values adhere to are protecting human life, family, religious freedom, and conscience. Their ideal of the ‘protection of the family’ fundamentally opposes the rights of LGBTIQ+ people and specific women’s rights, as they are solely referring to marriage between a man and a woman and are opposed to arrangements such as surrogacy and abortion. This is evident from the list of values prominently displayed on their website (Political Network for Values, n.d.).

These values also go against self-determination rights, migrant-, and women’s rights concerning abortion and their right of choice.

The Political Network for Values has '10 core values'

1. 'It is our duty to legally protect the right of life, as life is the first of all human rights.'
2. The right to life should begin at the moment of conception when they believe that the 'human being's' life is at its most vulnerable. Additionally, they reject the destruction of human embryos, cloning, genetic manipulation and surrogacy. At the same time, they promote research on adult stem cells and stem cells from amniotic fluid and the umbilical cord.
3. The defence of the family requires unequivocal commitment as a family is a core of society and the first "school" to build character and values that prepare the individual to exercise a positive role in society.
4. The institution of marriage consists of a man and a woman. An institution in which they each make different, complementary contributions to the process of family formation. They believe that they must promote the institution of marriage on civic and legal levels.
5. It is the parents' right and not the State's right to decide a child's education based on the parents' moral, religious, philosophical and pedagogical convictions.
6. They believe work is essential to a person's dignity and encourage fair and decent wages for everyone in our society.
7. They reject the ideology of relativism and find it essential to emphasise the value of duties.
8. They believe that euthanasia and abortion cannot be considered a right and that expanding research on palliative care is essential.
9. The defence of the right of objection, especially in healthcare against relativism, is a commitment they believe is imperative.
10. Lastly, they believe that the defence of religious freedom is central to human dignity (Political Network for Values, n.d.).

Tradition, Family and Property

Another major WCF partner is the global organization Tradition, Family and Property. Established in Brazil in 1971, its origin traces back to a handbook named 'Revolution and Counter-Revolution'. Similar to the WCF, it started as an academic gathering focused on the need for restoring the 'traditional family' values, but it soon expanded worldwide to reach what is now an association of 120,000 active members with 48 branches.

Branches are found all over the globe and are recognised as 'autonomous' and with countless other branches that carry different names. On its website, it presents itself as a saviour for the 'moral crisis' taking place in the contemporary world; TFP is 'on the front lines of the Culture War' (American TFP, 2022). TFP's founder was Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira, a conservative Christian landowner from Brazil and the author of the TFP handbook. TFP opposes progressive reforms the brought forward by Pope Francis (TFP, 2023), supports the historical primacy of Church-based states, and promotes a

traditional vision of marriage, women, and the family. TFP also opposes socio-economic equality, advocating for inherited 'property' (Datta, 2018a). The presence of TFP in Europe exploded after the 2000s, when TFP proposed a less centralised leadership, allowing for the **expansion of branches** and autonomy across Europe. Its European headquarters were first located in France but then moved to Poland, establishing the organisation now known as the Ordo Iuris Foundation, another WCF partner which has played an immense role in the anti-abortion movement in Poland (Datta, 2018a).

Other influential actors

Although the actors mentioned above are some of the largest organisations in this network, an important role is played locally by other organisations which nevertheless are highly effective and often share similar values, networks, and associations.

Ordo Iuris

In Poland, the Ordo Iuris Institute for Legal Culture, which officially launched in 2013 and has over 20 staff members in 2019, according to their own activity reports. The conservative legal group has grown quickly and is well connected to many high ranking Polish and international politicians including via an office in Brussels next door to the HQ of the European Commission and offices of the European Council. They have been accepted in the EU 'transparency register' (reg.nr: 206499215012-94) and with that allowed to deploy 'activities to influence the EU policy and decision-making process'. Their latest financial records reportedly show an annual income of over 1.3 million euros, which has doubled since 2016, including the sums the group had available during its launch year (Ciobanu, 2021).

Ordo Iuris is a conservative anti-choice foundation influencing European policies and legislation through its legal expertise. Incorporated as a foundation in Poland (Ordo Iuris, n.d.), they use conservative Christian legal thinking to provide legal analysis on cases concerning the European Convention on Human Rights. They hold consultative and accredited status with the **European Parliament and the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)**. This allows them, by their account, to progress their agenda and underlines how they use democratic processes to further their work, which poses difficulty in challenging them. Ordo Iuris built a group of conservative 'lawyers' that acts as a legal umbrella for conservatism in religious freedom/anti-discrimination domains. For instance, it opposes abortion with no exclusions, same-sex marriage, civil partnerships, and sexual education. It pursues its objectives through academic activities and using research, as well as by using litigation and advocacy. (European Humanist Federation n.d.)



Ordo Iuris has led efforts to defend the 'traditional' or 'natural' family. Among PiS politicians, it has found a sympathetic ear for its ideas, giving it a vehicle through which to achieve its policy goals. Additionally, the group's conservative messaging has helped the Polish government build a narrative of **'resistance to the West'**, which Warsaw uses in its confrontation with the EU over LGBTIQ+ and women's rights (Ciobanu 2021).

One of Us

One of Us has reportedly spent over 129.2 million USD on anti-gender activities in the EU between 2009-2018 (Datta, 2021). It describes itself as an initiative by European citizens launched to uphold and guarantee the protection of human beings from the moment of conception in the EU's competence areas.

This EU citizen's initiative brings together a significant part of the pro-life and pro-family organisations within Europe and has collected nearly 2 million signers for its efforts. One of Us established and created the first Pro-Life organisation with its legal entity. The One of Us Federation was founded in September 2013 (One of Us, n.d.). In attendance at its launch was Jaime Mayor Oreja, former Spanish Minister of Home Affairs and founder and Honorary President of the Political Network for Values (One of Us, n.d) and now president of One of Us (Politico,

2022). Its members include other organisations across the EU, such as HazteOir and CitizenGO and the French Fondation Jérôme Lejeune (One of Us, n.d.). One of their ambassadors, Dr Massimo Gandolfini, ran for president in Italy on a 'pro-life' platform (European Conservative, 2022). One of Us also has a formal branch in The Netherlands, called 'One of Us Nederland'. Fondation Jérôme Lejeune was recently represented by a lawyer from the Alliance Defending Freedom International before the European Court of Human Rights (Datta, 2021).

Agenda Europe

Agenda Europe is a European network whose main objectives include opposing rights for the LGBTIQ+ community and promoting the positions of far-right extremist groups (Datta, 2019).

Agenda Europa was created in 2013 based on strict criteria of secrecy. Its specifics were only revealed in 2017 when multiple documents emerged regarding the project's operations, participants, goals, and funding (Wikipedia n.d.).

It started when in 2013, when an anonymous blog titled Agenda Europe appeared. It covered the news and current developments in European politics while simultaneously criticising all legal and political progress in human rights regarding sexuality and reproduction. The blog quickly became a focal point for traditionalist perspectives (Datta, 2019). In 2017 documents regarding the organisation of the agenda became public thanks to Franco-German Arte Television. These contained information on a secret kick-off meeting in 2013 which resulted in the blog, the annual meeting from their

board and a list of social network experts with whom the group was planning to work with. They receive(d) vast amounts of (financial) support from international business tycoons like the Slim family in Mexico, ancient House of Habsburg nobility, Russian Alexey Komov (see page 7) and senior Catholic prelates. Their board numbered about 100-150 individuals (including many political leaders and government officials from across Europe) and at least 50 conservative organizations.

The documents included a joint manifesto for the Agenda Europe called 'Restoring the natural order: 'An Agenda for Europe', which has been leaked to the public domain (Datta, 2019). It reveals their clear strategy for reaching their goals through political lobbying, petitions, referendum, and disinformation campaigns (Wikipedia, n.d.).

Alliance Defending Freedom International (ADFI)

ADF International (ADFI), an affiliate for the American Alliance Defending Freedom, is a faith-based legal advocacy organisation, which has its base in Vienna, Austria as well as in New York and Washington DC. They describe themselves as a 'human rights organisation' that aims to protect fundamental freedoms and promote the inherent dignity of all persons before national and international institutions.

Holding a United Nations ECOSOC consultative status (ADF International, 2010), ADFI is particularly successful in using legal action and influencing policy. They do so by supporting local organisations and allies at the national level, but they also file third-party interventions with the European Court of Human Rights. There is no comprehensive list of third-party interventions before the European Courts, making it difficult to determine the exact number of interventions by ADF (Krommendijk, van der Pas, 2022) and how they obtained these influential positions.

However, the GPAHE was able to identify that between 2013 and 2020, ADF filed interventions in 10 cases concerning gender-related issues such as sexual reproductive health rights and LGBTIQ+ rights (GPAHE, 2021); it claims these as successes after having opened its office in Vienna (ADF, n.d.).

Most recently, an ADF International lawyer represented a French foundation, Fondation Jérôme Lejeune, before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in a freedom of expression case (De Pracomtal Et Fondation Jérôme Lejeune C. France). The case revolved around a commercial by a foundation advocating for people with Down Syndrome under the title 'Dear Future Mom' about 'a pregnant woman who had received a prenatal diagnosis of Down Syndrome'. The national broadcasting agency had prohibited the commercial as it could 'trouble the conscience of women who, while complying with the abortion legislation, had made different personal choices'. The French

Supreme Court (Conseil d'État) dismissed and appealed against this decision, upon which the foundation launched a case with the ECHR. The ECHR decided to favour the French state (ECHR, 2022). ADFI argued this was an attack on the freedom of expression, with their legal counsel stating, 'This is a failure of justice not just for people with Down syndrome and disability rights advocates, but for all concerned with free expression in Europe' clarifying that at the heart of their support in the case is directed against abortion (ADFI, n.d.).

Another more straightforward example is a Slovenian 'pro-life' Zavod ŽIV!M, which ran an anti-abortion campaign on state-owned buses. The state took down the ads after a week, and the national equality body determined that this had been a discriminatory treatment of the NGO. In December 2021, however, a federal court ruled that this decision had to be reconsidered. In this case, a senior ADF International legal counsel supported Zavod ŽIV!M (ADF, n.d.).

The ADF has close ties with Ordo Iuris and Agenda Europe (GPAHE, 2021). ADF International, located in Vienna, is driven to convey its message to a broader public through, for example, communication campaigns and claims to have locations beyond the above-listed countries, and Belgium and France (ADFI, n.d.). We have yet to verify the location of these offices, as ADFI is known to work with independent local legal councils in their cases.

U Ime Obitelji

This movement is the Croatian part of the Tradition, Family and Property network.

It is a political movement with traditional catholic values that opposes same-sex marriage, among other issues. The movement is described as Catholic and right-wing and its ideology is characterised as an extreme moralism against divorce, communism and any form of change (Kahlina, 2020). Family values supporters from catholic backgrounds gathered thousands of volunteers in a coalition called

'U Ime Obitelji', which means 'In the Name of the Family'. They did this to collect signatures to force the government to hold a referendum which would consult the Croatian people. The referendum stated: 'Do you favor the introduction into the constitution of a clause defining marriage as the union between one man and one woman?' (U Ime Obitelji, n.d.).

The Foundation for the Protection of the Family and Tradition

In Estonia we find the Foundation for the Protection of the Family and Tradition, or SAPTK.

Founded in Tallinn at the end of 2011, it began its activities in 2012 with the global movement Tradition, Family, Property. SAPTK claims to act in the public interest based on its statutes and the laws of the Republic of Estonia. SAPTK is based on Christian

teaching, which supports the traditional society that respects the family, human dignity, moral law, and property rights. It is a conventional family rights pressure group that fights for the concept of the traditional family in Estonia (SAPTK, n.d.).

Aito Avioliitto

In Finland, there is a marriage movement called Aito Avioliitto, meaning 'genuine marriage'.

It aims to uphold marriage as a union solely between a man and a woman by law. It has been campaigning actively across Finland. The movement argues that it is children's natural right to have a mother and a father, using slogans including 'two fathers cannot replace a mother' and 'two mothers cannot replace a father'. In Helsinki, they report there have been verbal assaults on campaign activists attempting physical harm (Aito Avioliitto, n.d.).

Zivile Koalition

In Germany, traditional values are supported by the Zivile Koalition, an association similar to the far right Alternative Für Deutschland (AfD) party.

They publish demands and promote political campaigns that are related to those of AfD. The association was founded in 2005 by Beatrix von Storch, who since has been the first chairwoman, spokeswoman and secretary of the association. Supposedly an event by Zivile Koalition in March 2013 was the starting point for the founding of the AfD.

The association promotes the ban on abortion and anti-LGBTIQ+ statements (Civil Coalition, n.d.). One of the AfD prominent members under Beatrix von Storch, Birgit Malsack-Winkemann was arrested in December 2022 for her role as one of the drivers of the thwarted coup in Germany by the Reichbürger movement.

La Manif Pour Tous

La Manif Pour Tous, is a French organization and a part of Tradition, Family, Property similar to the U Ime Obitelji in Croatia.

It was founded in November 2012 by Frigide Barjot, Alberic Dumont and Ludovine de la Rochère as their president. They claim their primary purpose is respecting the child's best interests and basic needs. Children, according to them, are now threatened by reforms in society that are inspired by gender ideology. The movement is part of an that aims to promote the well-being and future of children and adults and society as a whole, commonly known as the 'general interest'. They describe themselves as acting for all generations, present and future, believing

that the family ought to be described as the 'crossroad' of the difference between the sexes and the difference in generations. According to them, 'only in this context will the necessities of a child come into the world, to know his identity and integrate into a group and society as a whole.' The movement also defends marriage and that this is recognised with the sexual reality of humanity, which means the difference of sexes, is essential to conceive a child, and establish a distinction between father and mother (Le Manif Pour Tous, n.d.).

Iona Institute

In Ireland, the Iona Institute is a socially conservative Christian advocacy group.

Also described as a Catholic pressure group—founded and headed by religious and social affairs commentator David Quinn and launched publicly in 2007. They mainly promote the place of religion and marriage in society. Some of their stances include

statements that children deserve the love of their mother and father. And they claim to promote freedom of conscience and religion, including the right to life (Iona Institute, n.d.).

Fondazione Novae Terrae

In Italy, the Fondazione Novae Terrae is a strong leader in the anti-gender movement.

Luca Volonté is the movement's founder; he was banned from life from the Council of Europe and sentenced to four years in prison for accusations of corruption. One of its 'successful' actions includes blocking/weakening legal and educational reforms regarding sexual minorities; they were able to shape the public debate on sexual rights in favour of the terms used by anti-gender actors to frame their discourse. From an investigation by an Italian newspaper, it became public that the movement collected 100.000 euros a month from the Russia/Azerbaijani offshore and

redistributed this money between Italy, Spain, Great Britain, Hungary, Poland, and the US, using it to fund right-wing religious organisations and campaigns against abortion, gay marriage, and divorce (L'Espresso, 2018.) The investigations also linked the foundation to the WCF, Russian oligarchs, and even Steve Bannon. According to the Prosecutor's Office Volontè also received €2.39 million to organise support for Azerbaijani officials in the Council of Europe. In January 2021, Criminal Section X of the Court of Milan sentenced Luca Volontè to four years in prison.

Coalitia Pentru Familie

In Romania, the Coalition Pentru Familie, is an association of approximately 30 Romanian non-governmental organisations. They promote the traditional family and are part of the anti-abortion movement. The associations,

which include Orthodox, neo-Protestant, Greek Catholics, Catholics and right-wing extremists, break Romania between American religious fundamentalism and Russian propaganda (Danciu, 2016).

Alliance for Family

In Slovakia, the civic association Alliance for Family advocates for traditional values is chaired by Anton Chromic.

The Alliance for Family is an initiative of individuals and organisations, launched in December 2013 to promote the values of family and marriage. They have over 90 organisations supporting their five main objectives: 1) they advocate for a firm definition of marriage in the Slovak legislation, which entails a union between one man and one woman, 2) they want to inform young people more thoroughly about the meaning and benefits of marriage and the family that arises from marriage, 3) they believe the cultural, social and legislative support and respect for the family are established by traditional marriage as the fundamental cell of society, 4) they believe in preventing any form that weakens the conventional position of marriage in society, for instance, by introducing new family legal structures similar to marriage, and finally 5) they believe in holding on to the prioritisation of the child's interest in being raised and growing up in a stable and complete family with a mother and father and adopting this as the policy of the State (Alliance for Family, n.d.).

A referendum on banning same-sex marriage was held in Slovakia on 7 February 2015. Critics claimed the referendum was pushed by religious and conservative organisations,[3] aiming to block gay couples from gaining more rights.[4]

In June 2014, the Slovakia National Council amended the country's constitution to specifically deny same-sex couples the legal protections associated with marriage.

The referendum was initiated after the conservative church backed group Alliance for Family gathered 400,000 signatures calling for a vote on the law. The Conference of Slovak Bishops, which organises anti-abortion and anti-euthanasia rallies overwhelmingly supported the move.

The conservative Christian platform CitizenGo, run by Brian S. Brown, the American founder of the National Organization for Marriage and host for the World Congress of Families, supported the referendum (Wikipedia n.d.).

The Institute of Christian Culture

In Lithuania, the Institute of Christian Culture focuses on fostering the coexistence of a society based on Christian moral principles and safeguarding the

traditional family as the fundamental pillar of the community (Institute of Christian culture, n.d.).

Iskreni Institute

In Slovenia the Iskreni Institute is run by founder and director Igor Vovk.

The institute organises the 'Family Festival'. They are known for their anti-LGTBIQ+ beliefs while claiming in an interview that they are not against same-sex couples but the LGBTIQ+ ideology. From their point of view, this ideology aims to indoctrinate children

and adopt children by bypassing adoption procedures.

The institute is known for stating that homosexuality 'can be cured' (a.k.a. Conversion Therapy) and for supporting an abortion ban (ILGA-Europe, 2021).

The Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe

Headquartered in Brussels, Belgium, the Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe is quite active and was founded in 1997.

It is an umbrella organisation that serves as a European liaison platform for its members to discuss family policy issues and exchange their experiences. It has 19 member organisations from 14 different countries and eight associated members. They ensure a political representation of their issues in the EU and with the Council of Europe and are registered in the EU Transparency Register

(under nr 509209111889-44) allowing them to lobby with the EU Parliament and other institutions. They promote the beauty of the family, its wealth, and the dignity of its members. The group has participatory status with the Council of Europe, and they are a member of the fundamental rights platform of the EU (Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe, n.d.).



Discourse: a Closer Look

In this chapter we take a closer look at the ways in which language is used – and abused – to convey ideologies, messages, mainstream ideas and positions, and influence and normalise these into the public and political debate. We zoom in on issues around gender, identity, and sexual health and reproductive rights as areas of focus for the actors described in this report. This is not a limitative overview and does not cover issues such as ‘the demographic winter’, or ‘demographic renewal’, the ‘great replacement’, or other right-wing extremist or populist narratives, conspiracies, and ideologies. These - and their links with this current report - are subject of JfP’s continued research and will be part of upcoming research publications.

Gender ideology

‘Gender ideology’ is the belief among ultra-conservative religious groups that ‘any critique of traditional concepts of femininity and masculinity is a form of ideological indoctrination from LGBTIQ+ groups’ (Biino, 2021). TFP considered an Italian bill addressing violence or discrimination on the basis of sexual identity or gender, and even disability, ‘Zan Bill’ to be dangerous and to represent ‘the dictatorship of LGBTIQ+ that becomes law curtailing the constitutionally-guaranteed freedom of opinion’ stated Antonio Brandi of Pro Vita & Famiglia) as quoted on the TFP-website by their president Julio Loreda of the Italian Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family, and Property (TFP, 2020). They **condemn Pope Francis** for not taking a stance and for insinuating that ‘sin against chastity is unimportant, inducing the faithful to error and sin, and favoring the Sexual Revolution’ (TFP, 2019).

These groups believe this ‘ideology’ threatens society’s ‘natural order’. All other ideas, forms of social life, and cultural values are painted as a dangerous ‘ideology’. This narrative has been used to fight against comprehensive sexual education - or brainwashing and indoctrination of children as some call it - and to justify policies and laws that discriminate against LGBTIQ+ people.

The ‘gender ideology’ narrative is committed to provoking fear and uncertainty and is often combined with sensationalism, disinformation, and data manipulation to portray ‘the family’ or **‘children’ as victims**. It became a powerful discursive weapon dedicated to preventing and undoing progress on women’s and LGBTIQ+ rights (Shameem, 2017; Shameem, 2021). Actors using this narrative argue that ‘gender ideology’ is destroying ‘traditional marriage’, the ‘natural social order’, the ‘natural family, and life itself (Wilkinson, 2017).

The concept of ‘gender ideology’ was contrived (or hijacked) by ultra-conservative, often, religious groups and has become the equivalent of a growing global movement opposing gender equality, same-sex marriage and adoption, abortion, transgender rights, and comprehensive sexual education. The term ‘ideology’ was previously used in the study of gender quality to describe how the study in this field could be described (Whitehead, 2016). Although this phrase in its current use was documented as early as 2003, its transnational use has increased remarkably since 2012, notably in Latin America, where La Manif Pour Tous (which organised mass protests against same-sex marriage in France in 2013) and CitizenGO have been incredibly influential (Wilkinson, 2017). The spread of such words across several conservative organisations can indicate a growing conservative unification with a global

dimension. They are well organised, which can be seen from the signing of a Universal Declaration on the Family and Marriage (the ‘Cape Town Declaration’) at the end of 2016, which was organised by the International Organization for the Family (Wilkinson, 2017) and signed by hundreds of religious, political,

and social leaders (C-Fam, 2016). It states that the extension of family rights and prerogatives to same-sex unions must be rejected, supposedly supported by Human Rights Council resolutions and echoing Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) on marriage.

Parental rights and protection of children

Ultraconservative organisations are also attempting to construct a new category of rights: ‘parental rights’. This notion has no support under existing human rights standards. It is another narrative used to defend the ‘traditional family’. In reality, it weakens children’s rights as binding legal standards currently protect them.

The screenshot shows the CitizenGO website interface for a petition. At the top, there are navigation links: HOME, ABOUT US, CAMPAIGNS, PRESS OFFICE, DONATE, JOIN. Below the navigation is the petition title: 'Protect Parental Rights in California Schools'. A progress bar indicates that 34,235 out of 50,000 signatures have been collected. A 'SIGN THIS PETITION NOW!' section contains an email input field, a checkbox for staying informed, and a red 'SIGN' button. Below the sign button, the petition text is visible, starting with 'Dear California Legislators and Policy Makers, We are resolved and steadfast in our determination to protect and defend our God-given, Constitutional parental rights and expect California policy makers to do the same'. The page is attributed to '© CitizenGO (2019)'.

This view aims to protect the traditional and hierarchical concept of the family. It strives to use children’s rights, as articulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to support the idea that parents should control their children and limit their freedoms. These organisations believe that children’s rights can only be protected in a traditional family setting (Shameem, 2017; Shameem, 2021).

The misleading discourse of ‘parental rights’ and ‘protection of children’ is usually applied in the **fight against comprehensive sexuality education** (CSE) and the push for religious home-schooling. These organisations argue that ‘sexual rights activists are deliberately and aggressively targeting our children to indoctrinate them

into adopting ‘radical sexual ideologies’ (Shameem, 2017). In 2019, CitizenGO promoted a petition to protect ‘parental rights’ in California schools. They claimed that California schools are ‘plagued’ with harmful sexual education curricula and that parents’ rights to determine how their children are educated about sex have been erased. ‘Children are being sexualised in the classroom. They are taught to unabashedly embrace a progressive attitude toward human sexuality and to affirm and celebrate lifestyles that often conflict with their religious and moral upbringing’ (CitizenGO, 2019). With that petition, they aimed to roll back ‘the shamelessly enacted policies that promote lifestyle choices that strip our children of their innocence’ (CitizenGO, 2019).

Right to life

The right to life, or pro-life, discourse is used for actors' anti-abortion mission. They portray themselves as a positive marketing tool. They never outright say they are against abortion or anti-gay; they market themselves as pro-life or pro-family (Bonny, personal communication, 2022).



© BBC news (2018)

It is argued that the right of an unborn child to live is recognised in international human rights law. In their meetings, events, or conferences, they often cite the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR): 'everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Article 6(1): 'every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life'.

The actors, however, interpret these articles as meaning that human life begins at conception to twist this to their advantage. In this view, abortion and even some forms of contraception are considered inherently immoral because they 'deprive the sexual act of its inherent dignity [...] into a commodity

that has no other purpose than the procurement of physical pleasure' (Agenda Europe, 2014, p. 55-56). The Vatican has even spoken of a 'prenatal genocide' of children with disabilities (Shameem, 2017).

CitizenGO has also launched an anti-abortion campaign stating that 'abortion is the prime cause of femicide in the world' (BBC, 2018).

Furthermore, in North America, slogans like 'Black preborn lives matter' are used for anti-abortion campaigns. This 'prenatal genocide' narrative adopts progressive themes of disability rights, women's rights, and racial justice to promote their anti-abortion agenda. Thus, communities that face deep discrimination in society are presented as threatened by the 'abortion-industry' (Shameem, 2017).

Protection of the family

The narrative of 'protection of the family' has been a critical tactic for conservative actors to construct a new category of rights where the family itself is a rights holder. Since 2014, several resolutions have been passed on the 'protection of the family' at the Human Rights Council.

Agenda Europe (2019) argues that the only way the family can be saved from its gradual destruction is to implement laws that 'reflect the purpose and meaning of marriage':

1. Marriage should be between one man and one woman.
2. Marriage should be a life-long commitment; ideally, divorce should not be made possible. Also, second or third marriages should be discouraged.
3. Social and fiscal advantages should be given only to couples who are married.

According to Agenda Europe (2014), these principles of Natural Law should be the international legal standard.

During a meeting of the WCF in Verona in March 2019, speakers argued that the '**natural family**' was under such systematic attack that the West is on the verge of a 'demographic winter' because not enough babies are being born (Geoghegan, 2020). As recent as September 2021, European Union Member States' Prime Ministers Viktor Orbán of Hungary, Janez Janša of Slovenia, Andrej Babiš of the Czech Republic, and the Serbian

President Aleksandar Vučić sign a 'Declaration on the Demographic Renewal of Europe'. The declaration states that no EU Member State has enough children to sustain its population growth. Signed at the 'IV Budapest Demographic Summit' - where businesspeople, scientists, lawyers, politicians, including former US Vice President Mike Pence were present - the declaration claims to put families at the heart of sustainability and calling for a multi-step plan to change demographics (PnfV, n.d.).

In a WCF monthly newsletter from March 2012, the group positioned their own 'culture of life' as strengthening the natural family as opposed to the threatening 'culture of death', 'declining birth rates and the **Demographic Winter**', 'the sexual revolution', and the 'homosexual lobby' (WCF, 2012). The term 'homosexualist lobby' or 'gay agenda' is used frequently by far-right (Christian) groups as a denigrating way to describe the groups fighting for LGBTIQ+ rights. It is also used to describe the alleged goal of LGBTIQ+ rights activists to recruit heterosexuals into a supposed 'homosexual lifestyle' (Berean Research, n.d.; Clowes, 2020).

Religious freedom

Another discourse that the actors have taken up is the discourse of freedom of religion, which is used to justify violations of human rights. However, this notion is now used by anti-LGBTIQ+ and women's rights groups to limit certain rights and position themselves as victims. They claim they are not given the freedom to practice their religion.

For example, the platform of CitizenGO promotes a radical redefinition of religious freedom (Whyte, 2017) and claims that religious freedom is 'under threat'. They suggest that **religious freedom** is

undermined by outside forces and other human rights protections (mainly rights related to gender, sexuality, and reproduction) (Shameem, 2021).

Once again, this is an example of how the actors are twisting accepted human rights to their advantage; by redefining them. Their tactic is to claim that the right to freedom of religion is supposed to protect a religion rather than protect people that are free to hold any religious beliefs (Shameem, 2017).

This discourse is mainly used to attack the rights of people whose gender identity and sexuality are non-conforming. For instance, one of CitizenGO's campaigns supports a conversion therapy organisation (the Core Issues Trust), from whom the British Barclays bank is withdrew its (banking) services, as did mail newsletter provider Mailchimp and

payments provider Paypal countered by a CitizenGo petition signed well over 70.000 times (CitizenGo, 2020). The campaign frames this act as 'an assault on religious freedom and personal conscience' (CitizenGO, 2020). CitizenGO, like many other anti-LGBTIQ+ groups, likes to employ a victimisation framing. They frequently ask how the EU will protect Christians because **'Christians are the main victims of religious persecution in Europe'**. CitizenGO has also advocated for a new Special Rapporteur for Religious Freedom at the European Parliament that will institutionalise their interpretation of religious freedom (Shameem, 2021).



The #FreeSpeechBus in front of the United Nations Headquarters in New York



9:07 PM · Mar 22, 2017

Photo: CitizenGO. The 'Free Speech Bus' touring the US and elsewhere around the globe, originally said: 'Boys have penises. Girls have vaginas. Don't be deceived'

Freedom of speech

Several organisations mentioned in this report use established rights in a democratic society and twist them to their advantage. It is, after all, their right to speak up (freedom of speech) about their beliefs and preferred policies. But the line between hate speech and the right to present your opinions is often very thin.

© NBP staff (2017)

A great example of an organisation that profits from the freedom of speech framing, and even claims that this right is under threat is CitizenGO. This manifested in their anti-trans bus, or **'Free Speech Bus'** as they call it. It toured around the United States in 2017 and was painted with transphobic slogans like 'boys are boys... and always will be. Girls are girls... and always will be' and 'boys have penises, girls have vulvas, don't be fooled'. Similar buses toured Germany, Italy, France, Chile, and Nairobi (Biino, 2021; Political Research Associates, 2018). The bus provoked many protests and was eventually forced off the road and banned in several Spanish cities by local authorities. However, CitizenGO is growing its reach, which has alarmed human rights advocates.

Another one of their stunts is the so-called **'hate-plane'**, which flew over Spain in 2017, denouncing its stance against a proposed law against discrimination based on sexual orientation. The plane carried a banner saying: 'they are coming for your children'. Campaigners who had planned the stunt argued that the proposed law was part of the

'political classes' effort to 'indoctrinate our children' (Whyte, 2017).

ADF (Alliance Defending Freedom) International also publicly supports freedom of speech. They present themselves as a 'world leader in defending religious freedom, free speech, the sanctity of life, parental rights, and God's design for marriage and family' (ADF, n.d.).

The actors attempt to embed these discourses into human rights standards (Shameem, 2021). For example, ADF (Alliance Defending Freedom) International and the ECLJ (European Centre for Law and Justice) specialise in legal advocacy, specifically called 'SRR lawfare'. This Sexual and Reproductive Rights (SRR) lawfare attempts to provoke the desired change away from expansive rights agendas through courts and other legal entities. The offices of ADF International and ECLJ are, therefore, specifically located in cities in Europe where international human rights institutions are based like Brussels, Geneva, Strasbourg, and Vienna (Datta, 2021).

Why should we care? Recommendations

Democracies provide fertile ground for subversion, activities that seek to undermine that same democracy by using its processes and freedoms to legitimise discourses, positions, and actions that are harmful and eroding. This report has identified several main tactics or modi operandi used to undermine our human and democratic rights.

Each actor mentioned in this report uses a unique mix of tactics, whether through concealing their true intentions with words such as 'pro-life' and 'pro- traditional family' or using social media platforms to spread their harmful beliefs. Whether through online trolling, doxing, and threatening people with opposing views, or global networking events to gain support, funding, and power. It is becoming increasingly clear that more and more of our democratic and human rights are being discussed, questioned, and threatened by these groups and movements. Abortion laws are being revised, LGBTIQ+ free zones implemented, and LGBTIQ+ people are being shut out from the media (Kovács, 2021). But it doesn't stop there. Migrants are being harassed, scientists threatened, journalists targeted, and voters manipulated. In the end it affects each and every one of us.

What has become even more clear from this report is that actors are well-practiced, funded, and focused. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the following **recommendations**.

1. In terms of **societal implications**, this report indicates the need to raise more awareness about what is really going on in our societies and who is behind that. Our aim is to shed light on the tactics used by actors and through that raise awareness. This is critical because they are conducted 'under the radar' until they have. The fact that some these organisations are interconnected and located all over the world should be cause for concern. It has real harmful results for real people and polarises us without us knowing to a point of no return. As their power and resources continue to grow and find footing to undermine our democratic systems, it is essential to expose it before it grows into a genie that we cannot put back in the proverbial bottle.

It is JfP's recommendation that governments dedicate specific attention to this issue in their parliaments, schools, jointly with civil society organisations.
2. In terms of implications **on the state level**, these findings could impact how democracies are assessed by specific organisations engaged in the ranking of democracies. The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) releases a Global Peace Index (GPI) yearly, which ranks 163 states according to their peacefulness by looking at factors such as ongoing violence, increase in military spending, civil unrest, and so forth (IEP, personal communication, 2022). The three domains of peacefulness used are 'Social Safety and Security', 'Ongoing Domestic and International Conflict', and 'Militarization'. The GPI can arguably only catch conflicts and from institutionalised - on the radar - actors. In contrast, the activities discussed in this report are done purposely quiet and under the radar. Though the IEP recognises that 'non-institutional actors influence is tough to identify and determine' (IEP, personal communication, 2022). Again, we can only fight what we see.

It is JfP's recommendation that more effective mechanisms and methodologies to identify and track subversive activities are developed.

3. In addition, and **in relation to foreign influence**, awareness must be raised at the European Union level. In the case of FIMI, the EU's External Action Service is doing significant work to develop a collective and systematic response to this. In the case of the actors and activities described in this report, matters may be described as an exertion of soft power, and concern topics intertwined with the fabric of our open and progressive societies. A clear strategy on how to respond to these dynamics and those of (toxic) polarisation as a result of the activities of certain actors, is lacking.

It is JfP's recommendation that the European bodies, from the European Parliament to the European Commission, dedicate specific attention to this. One such example is

the action taken by individual Members of the European Parliament to call on their President Metsola, to inquire into some of the actors also described in this report.

4. Finally, we must remember that next to populist and right-wing politicians or conservative organisations, left-wing extremists, autocratic regimes, or large enterprises could also work along the identified modi operandi and tactics. Subversive actions give them the same opportunities to manipulate, reach their objectives to overrule their opponents, or oppresses their people and marginalised communities. By exposing these tactics, we can recognise these in other extremist groups and be more conscious of them, in other regions, especially the Global South.

It is JfP's recommendation that awareness is raised across international institutions including the bodies of the EU and the United Nations.

The points is, **if we want democracy to flourish, we will have to fight for it**, Tweeted US President Obama on 11 June 2022.

Democracy is not a given, it can be attacked, and it can be eroded. A good example is Hungary, now a hybrid between a democracy and an autocracy, in the middle of a liberal, progressive democratic bastion: the European Union.

So, it is our call on everyone, and especially those in power, to **stop being naïve and take action** to protect our democracies, for all of us. Until then, Justice for Prosperity and its partners will continue to investigate, expose, predict and defend.

Methodology

The aim of this report is to 1) provide the theoretical foundation for the WhoDis project of Justice for Prosperity and development of our detection technology; 2) render accessible the available information to a broader audience by simplifying current research; 3) present newly identified tactics used by these actors to expand the knowledge on this topic.

The core question of this research was to identify the tactics of certain actors - NGOs, political and non-political figures, and associations - that are involved in the dissemination of anti-woman and anti-LGBTIQ+ rights discourses and actions, which altogether represent a threat to the status of democracies and human rights in the EU.

Important research has been done on the actors, their tactics, and their links, particularly by Bonny, Datta, and Shameem. Their reports are extensive and inform much of the current understanding of these actors. Nevertheless, due to the denseness, the audience reached by this research likely remains within the policy level and academic debates without necessarily reaching informing the public. For that reason, one of the objectives of our organisation and our work is to fill that gap and convert that knowledge into easily accessible information.

The information in this report was gathered via open-source intelligence (OSINT), publicly available information, leaked emails released by the Russian hacker collective Shaltai Boltai (Humpty Dumpty), leaked email correspondence from Kirill Frolov, Vice-Director of the Institute for CIS Countries, spokesman of the Union of Orthodox Citizens, Wikileaks, and interviews with experts from JfP's network of partners. The report was spurred by several articles investigating connections between Russia and European political and non-political elites engaged in promoting anti-LGBTIQ+ and anti-women's rights. More information was subsequently gathered on links between three main groups: Russian oligarchs, European far-right parties, and the American

Christian Right. That information led to identifying actors that are arguably the most active as their presence seems crucial to maintaining a global '*traditional values*' network; they are defined as the 'actors'.

Other academic literature and reports eventually brought to light additional actors whose presence is anchored in almost all the European Union countries and whose activities seem to be coordinated and interdependent (Datta, 2021; Shameem, 2017). The open-source information was used to gather data on real-life events that can be used to verify the actors' impact on our democracies. This informed our research on political initiatives, the discourse used by politicians connected to the actors, and events focused on combating democratic rights. Finally, four interviews were carried out with renowned experts with a long-standing tradition of researching aggression against communities and democratic rights, and with organisations measuring the level of democracy worldwide. These are Remy Bonny, Klementyna Suchanow, the Institute for Economics and Peace, and the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism (GPAHE). For each data point, the following information was extracted and isolated systematically: a) who are the actors (organisations, politicians, and individuals); b) where are they active (i.e. in which European country are they established); c) what tools do they use; d) are they connected with other like-minded organisations/actors. The same scheme was replicated during the interviews. The participants were asked to talk about the actors they knew, the tactics they identified, and if they received any threats for engaging in their work.

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Backgrounds of News Clippings

In 2021, marchers at Zagreb Pride experienced 'the worst homophobic attack in **Croatia** in a decade.' During the march, there were multiple reports of violent attacks, verbal abuse and the burning of a pride flag. The two people suspected of being responsible for inciting these attacks are lawmakers Nikola Grmoja and Bozo Petrov, from the political party 'Bridge'. A week before the attacks, Nikola Grmoja announced that he planned to introduce legislation that would 'protect' children from LGBTIQ+ propaganda as part of an anti-pedophile law (Starcevic, 2021).

The far-right Bulgarian National Union interrupted a new LGBTIQ+ movie screening in **Bulgaria**. They attempted to halt the screening, just one of the many assaults on the rights and freedoms of Bulgarian LGBTIQ+ people (Todorov, 2021).

Milos Zeman, a member of the political party 'Party of Civic Rights' and current president of the **Czech Republic**, has publicly said he finds transgender people disgusting during a TV interview and has stated that he does not believe the new law by Hungary has anything to do with LGBTIQ+ rights. He then compares 'undergoing a sex change operation to committing a crime of self-harm.' He has also stated that if he were younger, he would organise a counter-protest with heterosexual people. This statement by the president has contributed to an unsafe environment for transgender people in the Czech Republic. As president, Milos Zeman has the power to veto any bill which has already been passed aside from constitutional bills, risking a regression in LGBTQ+ rights in the Czech Republic and leading members of the LGBTIQ+ community to feel unsure (BBC, 2021).

In **Estonia**, the government initiated a referendum to amend the family act to make the definition of marriage solely between a man and a woman. The referendum was planned to be held at the same time as the local municipal elections. By doing this, the polls suddenly become focused on the issue of LGBTIQ+ rights instead of some of the other vital issues that would usually be the focus of local municipality elections. It is believed that the Estonian Conservative People's Party (EKRE) will use the results of the referendum for their benefit in the coming years. In addition, it suits the other coalition members due to the number of Russian voters in their voter base, who make up the majority of their electorate (Euronews, 2020).

Italy's senate voted against a bill that would have made violence against LGBTIQ+ people, disabled people, and misogyny, a hate crime. The 315-member senate voted by 154 to 131. According to the far-right parties that voted against the bill in the upper house, the law would have suppressed freedom of expression and promoted 'homosexual propaganda' in schools. The vote in the Senate to block the bill was hailed by Matteo Salvini's far-right La Lega and Fratelli d'Italia led by Giorgia Meloni (The Guardian, 2021).



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