

# “Gender Ideology” Battles in the European Bubble

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Neil Datta and David Paternotte

## Setting the stage

In December 2013, the European Parliament (EP) unexpectedly rejected the *Report on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights* (SRHR), known as the Estrela Report after Edite Estrela, the Portuguese MEP in charge of drafting the report (Estrela 2013). This report was meant to encourage EU member states to improve their domestic policies in a range of areas, including contraception, maternal health, abortion, sexuality education, youth empowerment, and overall women’s health. Human rights advocates hoped that it would provide an impetus for the European Union (EU) to become a global leader on SRHR. Following an unprecedented campaign that claimed that “the Estrela report calls for minors to act as sex education propagandists in the EU and in candidate countries” (Mertz 2013), the EP instead adopted a weak alternative resolution of a mere 235 words from the center-right European People’s Party (EPP), which recalled that SRHR policies are the competences of member states (“European Parliament resolution of 10 December 2013 on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights” 2013; Mondo and Close 2019).

A few months later, in April 2014, the EP hosted a special hearing on a European Citizen’s Initiative (ECI) entitled “One of Us” (“European Parliament hearing on ‘One of Us’” 2014). This ECI, an instrument created by the EU to foster direct democracy, had gathered over 1.7 million signatures of citizens across member states, calling on the EU to ensure that no funding was used for activities that “presuppose the destruction of human embryos.”<sup>1</sup> By far the biggest at the time in terms of signatures collected and countries involved, this ECI qualified as a success, and its backers beamed with enthusiasm in the packed

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1 [https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/initiatives/details/2012/000005\\_en](https://europa.eu/citizens-initiative/initiatives/details/2012/000005_en)

room of the EP where they presented their initiative to Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), later followed by a personal meeting with the European Commission (EC).

The enthusiasm, however, was short-lived. In May 2014, the EC issued a 19-page rejection, stating that “a funding ban would constrain the Union’s ability to deliver on the objectives set out in the MDGs [Millennium Development Goals], particularly on maternal health, and the ICPD [International Conference on Population and Development], which were recently reconfirmed at both international and EU levels” (Directorate-General for Research and Innovation 2014). In reaction, the ECI organizers mounted a legal challenge to the Commission’s rejection, which the defendants eventually lost in December 2019 (Court of Justice of the European Union 2019). In parallel, they established a permanent pressure group by transforming the ECI into a non-governmental organization (NGO), the One of Us Federation (Datta 2021). In 2015, some of the same actors organized another, albeit far less successful, ECI, “Mum, Dad & Kids,” to establish a common definition of marriage and the family across the EU that would have hampered the mutual recognition of nationally granted rights for LGBTIQA\* people (Mos 2018).

## Contestation of Gender at the European level

Human rights defenders experienced these two events as a major blow, while anti-gender actors celebrated them as the start of what they hoped would be many similar initiatives (Datta 2018; Peiro Traperero 2021). These two events, a few months apart, marked the beginning of what would become protracted battles around *gender ideology* in the *European bubble* (the universe of policy makers, civil servants, lobbyists, and civil society organizations that gravitate around the EU and other European institutions centered around Brussels and Strasbourg). They also signaled that the EU’s support and leadership on SRHR could no longer be taken for granted.

While contestation of gender-related issues, or anti-gender activism, has attracted a great deal of scrutiny in academic, journalistic, and activist literature at the national level, the engagement of the same phenomenon with European institutions remains a near *terra incognita* (Marques-Pereira 2021; Ruzza 2021a). Extant scholarship focuses on parliamentary debates (Kantola and Lombardo 2020; Ahrens and Woodward 2021) and the progressive response (Cullen 2021; Ruzza 2021b). One exception, Émilie Mondo’s doctoral

research, explores EU-level morality politics through the prism of culture wars, with a focus on the ECI One of Us (2018).<sup>2</sup> In his work on international norms in the field of LGBTIQA\* rights, Martijn Mos has also studied the ECIs One of Us and Mum, Dad & Kids to sketch the emergence of Religious-Right actors in European politics (2018; see also Mos forthcoming). Finally, some scholars have studied EU anti-gender activism through the prism of populism and far-right politics (Ruzza, Berti, and Cossarini 2021).

Among the scholars quoted above, Mos is the only one to use the expression *Religious Right*, which he presents as synonymous with *Christian Right*. In this chapter, we follow this line of research to highlight the role played by actors who invoke so-called Christian values to oppose SRHR in Europe today. Indeed, if it would be misleading to claim that all anti-gender actors active in European politics are inspired by Christian values (some are known secularists or atheists or prefer to claim political values over religious ones), many—both among NGOs and politicians—display overt connections to ultraconservative understandings of Christianity. Therefore, *gender ideology* is not only a Catholic invention (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017) but also remains to a large extent a predominantly Christian battle, including in European institutions.

This chapter provides readers with key milestones to help navigate the Christian-Right universe active in the European bubble<sup>3</sup> with the hope that more researchers will investigate further. It discusses three aspects: the growth of a new ultra-conservative civil society at the European level; the ways in which these actors engage in European politics and the evolving traction of anti-gender stances among politicians; and the differences between the 2013 and 2021 EP reports on SRHR.

## The growth of an ultra-conservative civil society

The defeat of the Estrela Report and the success of the One of Us ECI were the direct result of the mobilization of a myriad of recently created Christian-Right groups in Europe. Today, a complex galaxy of actors and organizations involved

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2 For information on anti-gender politics at EU level, see also Marques-Pereira 2021 and Ruzza 2021b.

3 This chapter focuses on the EU. However, in the domains of rights and values, it is impossible to isolate this institution from the Council of Europe. As a result, several of the organizations mentioned in this chapter are active in both institutional settings.

in European politics has emerged, with actors cooperating and at times competing with each other. Some are based in the institutional hubs of Brussels or Strasbourg, while others are anchored at national level and may only occasionally travel to European capital cities (Zacharenko 2016 and 2020).

Table 1: Main anti-gender organizations active in the European bubble

European branches of US organizations	New European organizations	Organizations linked to religious institutions	International fora
European Center for Law and Justice (ECLJ)	CitizenGo	Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE)	Agenda Europe
Alliance Defending Freedom International (ADFI)	One of Us Federation	Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (FAFCE)	Political Network for Values (PNV)
World Youth Alliance (WYA)	Ordo Iuris and Tradition, Family, Property (TFP) Europe for the Family/La Manif Pour Tous European Dignity Watch (EDW)	European Christian Political Movement (ECPM)	World Congress of Families (WCF)

These actors fall into three broad categories: European branches of US Christian-Right organizations, newly created European organizations and networks, and organizations directly linked to religious institutions. In addition, they have forged specific transnational networks and fora where they can meet and coordinate their actions. Most of these actors claim to be inspired by their Christian values, justifying the use of the label *Christian Right*. Several are also connected through various Catholic networks such as Opus Dei, the Charismatic Renewal, the Neocatechumenal Way, and Tradition, Family, Property. It is crucial, however, to distinguish these from religious institutions

such as the Roman Catholic Church and traditional but less professionalized and more local faith-based political engagement, as found, for instance, in older pro-life groups. The development of this new ultra-conservative civil society, which recalls the *NGOization* of ultra-conservative religious activism elsewhere (Vaggione 2005), has occurred in a three-fold process relying on the professionalization, generational renewal, and transnationalization of *pro-life* (anti-abortion) and *pro-family* (anti-LGBTIQA\*) activism in Europe.

### European branches of US organizations

As part of the internationalization of their activities (Datta 2021), several organizations from the US Christian Right have opened branches in Europe, namely the European Center for Law and Justice (ECLJ), the Alliance Defending Freedom International (ADFI), and the World Youth Alliance (WYA). Both the ECLJ and the ADFI are specialized in legal advocacy and strategic litigation. The ECLJ is the European offspring of the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), while the ADFI has opened several offices in Europe since 2014. The ECLJ served as the legal focal point for the One of Us ECI and led the opposition efforts to the Estrela Report, while the ADFI has argued that religious freedom constitutes a higher order of human rights above LGBTIQA\* and women's rights. The WYA, with an office in Brussels, claims to serve as the voice of young people regarding Catholic social doctrine, with a focus on human dignity.

### New European organizations

In the last 20 years, several organizations have emerged in Europe to mount anti-gender campaigns, some devoting much of their efforts transnationally. Launched in 2013, CitizenGo is an ultra-conservative, multi-lingual petition platform and advocacy group headquartered in Madrid with affiliates in 15 countries around the world. Journalists have revealed connections with far-right actors spanning Italy, Mexico, the Russian Federation, and the US (Datta 2021).

The One of Us European Federation for Life and Human Dignity (the One of Us Federation), based on the successful eponymous ECI, gathers all those in Europe advocating for the *right to life*, with *life* reduced to lobbying against

abortion and euthanasia. Present in 24 EU countries, the One of Us Federation presents itself as “the most representative and global pro-life movement.”<sup>4</sup>

Created in 2013, the Ordo Iuris Institute for Legal Culture (Ordo Iuris) is a Polish organization that is part of the transnational movement Tradition, Family, Property (TFP), a neo-feudal network originally from Brazil but now composed of over 30 organizations spread across Europe, Latin America, and the United States (Datta 2020). In Poland, Ordo Iuris is behind policy initiatives such as the 2016 bill to ban abortion and the “Stop Paedophilia” law, which criminalizes sexuality education and allows *LGBT-free zones*. From its domestic policy and fundraising successes, Ordo Iuris has founded a higher education institution in Warsaw, the Collegium Intermarium, launching branches in half a dozen countries.

Two other organizations merit mention: Europe for the Family, which aimed to monitor French MEPs following the success of the *Manif pour Tous*, and the defunct European Dignity Watch (EDW),<sup>5</sup> which was long headed by Sofia Kuby (the daughter of anti-gender thinker Gabriele Kuby and now the Director of Strategic Relations & Training at the ADFI). EDW ran an annual European Advocacy Academy where prominent anti-gender leaders trained a younger generation of activists.

## Religious organizations

A third category includes organizations officially connected to a wider religious institution, namely the Roman Catholic Church, as well as to other groups professing religious beliefs. The main actor is the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), which serves as the official representation of the Roman Catholic Church to European institutions. The COMECE enjoys privileged access to EU decision makers through a formalized dialogue with EU institutions. The COMECE hosts another Christian-Right actor, the Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (FAFCE), which gathers family associations inspired by Catholic social teachings from various European countries and lobbies EU institutions to promote family-friendly policies.

In the early 2000s, several Christian actors joined forces to establish the European Christian Political Movement (ECPM) as the only explicitly religious

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4 <https://oneofus.eu/about-us/organization/>

5 Established in 2010, the last sign of EDW dates from December 2018.

European political party. Historically close to the Dutch Reformed Church and its associated political parties, the ECPM has moved toward a defense of conservative Christian social values. It includes several minority Christian political currents that are not part of the wider world of Christian Democracy, be they Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant in inspiration. It is the only organization with such an overt ecumenical profile in the European bubble.

## International fora

These actors are tightly interconnected through both formal and informal channels. For instance, the leaders, staff members, or spouses of one organization may sit on the board of or work for another or several other groups. For example, Luca Volonté was at the same time founder of the *Novae Terrae* Foundation, board member of CitizenGO, and president of the *Dignitatis Humanae* Foundation close to US far-right strategist Steve Bannon. Inside the European bubble, there is Maria Hildingson, who heads the FAFCE, while her spouse, Tobias Teuscher, has served as a staff member for several of the European Parliament's most vocal anti-gender MEPs and ran as a candidate for the European Parliament as a member of France's Pro-Life political party, which was itself headed by the president of the FAFCE. In addition, these actors and organizations regularly address each other's events, forming veritable echo chambers (Datta 2021). They have also established several fora where they meet regularly for networking and strategizing. The most noteworthy fora are the World Congress of Families (WCF), Agenda Europe, and the Political Network for Values (PNfV).

The best known is the WCF, established in 1997 by Russian and US civil society actors and operated today from the US by the International Organization for the Family. At its latest meeting in Verona, Italy, in 2019, the WCF gathered all the main currents of European alt- and far-right political actors as well as Russian personalities, US Christian-Right leaders, and Catholic actors openly critical of the Vatican. Recently, the WCF has focused on Europe, and its most recent gatherings before Verona took place in Moldova (2018), Hungary (2017), and Georgia (2016), often with significant support from public authorities. The Verona gathering attracted substantial critical media coverage and mass street protests, and the WCF has not since announced a new gathering.

Diametrically opposed is the secretive Agenda Europe, a loose network of over 300 organizations and individuals from more than 30 European countries closely connected to the Catholic hierarchy, which has held closed annual meet-

ings since 2013. Agenda Europe involves transnational and national anti-gender NGOs, conservative academics, and officials inside European and national administrations, as well as a significant number of US Christian-Right actors who draw inspiration from a common manifesto entitled *Restoring the Natural Order: An Agenda for Europe*. Agenda Europe's members-only meetings have provided a platform to strategize and deploy over 15 policy initiatives across Europe (Datta 2018).

Finally, the Political Network for Values (PNfV) focuses on gathering political actors, such as parliamentarians and ministers, with *pro-life* and *pro-family* civil society. Focusing on the Americas and Europe, it holds regular strategizing sessions on how to restrict, prevent, and eventually ban abortion and halt the expansion of same-sex marriage. The Hungarian minister and since May 2022 President of the Republic of Hungary, Katalin Novák, has also chaired the PNfV. The latest transatlantic meeting took place in May 2022 in Budapest, with the aim of building a “pro-freedom agenda globally.”<sup>6</sup>

## European Christian-Right engagement in the European bubble

Christian-Right actors engage in the European bubble through four distinct approaches: seeking formal recognition, traditional advocacy and campaigning, discrediting supranational institutions, and attempting infiltration.

As new actors in the European bubble, the first step was establishing credibility. The manifesto *Restoring the Natural Order* calls on Agenda Europe members to seek accreditation with international institutions (Datta 2018). This resulted in several Christian-Right NGOs registering on the European Parliament Transparency Register (CitizenGO and Ordo Iuris) and seeking formal recognition at the UN (CitizenGO and Ordo Iuris) and the Council of Europe (ADFI and FAFCE). This approach has had mixed results, as some have successfully established themselves as respectable interlocutors (FAFCE), while others have been rejected (ADFI) or faced controversy (Ordo Iuris and CitizenGO) (Datta 2021).

Next, these actors engage with European decision-making processes in traditional advocacy. They employ the same legal, advocacy, and campaigning techniques as progressive actors and, apart from their values and policy claims, are similar to other organizations gravitating around the European

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6 <https://politicalnetworkforvalues.org/en/>

bubble. Examples of such engagement include their activism to defeat the EP reports on SRHR. A subset of actors have specialized in SRHR *lawfare* (Yamin, Andion, and Datta 2018), specifically the ADFI and the ECLJ (Relano Pastor 2021), while Ordo Iuris (Datta 2020) was recognized as "Bully Lawyers of the Year" in 2021.<sup>7</sup> Some actors have also sought to secure EU funding, such as the WYA, which has tapped into the ERASMUS program (the EU's youth exchange program), and the ECPM, which has benefited from core funding from the EP since 2010 (Datta 2021).

However, these actors engage in a *double-jeu* with European institutions (Mos 2018): in parallel to their traditional advocacy, they proactively attempt to discredit them, an observation consistent with anti-gender discourse (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017). For instance, the One of Us ECI organizers explained that the Commission's rejection of their request was due to the hostility of EU institutions toward Christian interests and values.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the ECLJ issued an extensive report asserting that ECHR judges were "agents of Soros" (Puppink 2020). This dual approach toward their formal engagement has even led some scholars to wonder whether Christian-Right actors are not in fact friends of the court but rather *inimici curiae* in engaging in litigation (Relano Pastor 2021) and whether the European Christian Right as a whole can be considered "conservative un-civil society" (Ruzza 2021).

The most ambitious engagement with European institutions has been infiltrating them and eventually trying to coopt them toward anti-gender objectives. The Christian Right has always been a force in politics (see the next section), and these political insider allies are coordinated through the transnational networks mentioned above. These in turn have served as platforms to place key allies inside European institutions, such as through the creation of the new post of Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU ("President Juncker appoints the first Special Envoy" 2016; Datta 2018). The boldest attempt at infiltration came in early 2021, when the founder of Ordo Iuris became one of the Polish Government's candidates for the ECHR (but was swiftly rejected).

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7 <https://www.the-case.eu/campaign-list/the-european-slap-contest>

8 For instance, see <https://oneofus.eu/three-years-ago-we-submitted-about-2-million-signatures/>.

## Evolving political traction

Anti-gender activism has passed through several stages. Starting within Catholic thinkers and hierarchs eager to better understand and counter the perceived losses of the 1990s at the United Nations, by the early 2010s, it had become the focus of a range of conservative civil society groups (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017; Datta 2018). From civil society, anti-gender activism has now migrated to the realm of politics—and from politics to state policies. A similar process has happened at the European level, with increased traction within European institutions.

Anti-gender actors' influence on politics has taken two routes: first via the mainstream current of Christian politicians within the EPP and, more recently, through the emergent alt- and far right.<sup>9</sup> Across countries such as Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain, and Slovakia, there are ample examples of leading political figures within national EPP-affiliated parties playing key roles in anti-abortion organizations and wider anti-gender campaigns (Datta 2021). These include Jaime Mayor Oreja, a first-rank Spanish EPP politician with leadership roles in the One of Us Federation and the PNFV; Gudrun Kugler, currently an EPP Austrian parliamentarian who was the co-convenor of Agenda Europe; and Ján Figel', a senior Slovak Christian Democrat politician who became the first Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the European Union.

However, this route has proved to be of limited utility: Christian-Right EPP politicians were a minority within the EPP, who could only thwart progressive advances and have failed to initiate policies to advance their objectives. At the same time, alt-, far-, and hard-right political forces across Europe have seized upon the potential of anti-gender campaigning, opening a new route to push forward anti-gender claims. Older established parties such as Italy's Lega, France's Rassemblement National, Hungary's FIDESZ, and Poland's PiS have incorporated some anti-gender claims into their platforms. Newly emergent alt-right parties have also turned anti-gender issues into a key component of the parties' DNA, as in the case of Spain's Vox, Germany's AfD, Portugal's Chega, and the Netherlands' Forum for Democracy. Several of these parties have become key allies of the European Christian Right today. Many of these

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9 Without forgetting the ECPM mentioned above, which is officially a political party but acts more like an NGO.

parties have regrouped in the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and Identity and Democracy (ID) groups at the European Parliament.

All this has significantly transformed debates at the European Parliament. In some cases, these political parties have also come into power, either leading governments (as in the case of PiS in Poland and FIDESZ in Hungary) or joining coalitions (as in the case of Lega in Italy and Vox at the regional level in Spain), with a major impact on the European Council. From these positions, Christian-Right actors have a new platform to influence EU policies. This has resulted, for instance, in Poland and Hungary attempting to block policy documents between the EU and developing-country partners (Fox 2020) and the EU Child Rights Strategy<sup>10</sup> because of references to EU-agreed language on *gender*.

### Comparing the 2013 and 2021 EP reports on SRHR

The shift in anti-gender political support becomes evident when comparing the two main reports of the EP dealing with SRHR. The EP has worked on SRHR on two occasions over the past decade: in 2013 with the Estrela Report and in 2021 with the Matic Report ("European Parliament resolution of 24 June 2021 on the situation of sexual and reproductive health and rights" 2021). In 2013, the Estrela Report met defeat by a narrow margin, with the adoption of the EPP alternative resolution. By contrast, the far-right alternative resolution failed to garner support beyond their immediate political family. By 2021, the situation had reversed. The far-right and conservative groups once again tabled alternative resolutions; however, both failed. When the EP voted on the substance of the Matic Report, the result was a resounding victory of 378 in favor to 255 against, with coordinated support coming from the left, the Greens, and center-left and liberal groups, along with a split conservative group and support from other national parties (such as the Italian Five Star Movement).

Three main reasons explain this result: progressive actors were better prepared, Christian-Right actors used an outdated playbook, and the EP had established a track record of denouncing Christian-Right initiatives (Datta 2021b). First, on the heels of the defeat of the Estrela Report in late 2013 and the presentation of the One of Us ECI in April 2014, progressive MEPs and their civil society allies organized in several coordination mechanisms to neutralize Christian-Right activism in the EP, such as MEPs for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (SRR, a multi-party MEP working group to advance SRR) and the All

10 <https://www.eurochild.org/news/reaction-to-the-veto-on-eu-child-rights-strategy/>

of Us coalition (bringing together progressive political parties and SRHR civil society).

Second, Christian-Right actors replayed in 2021 the same strategies they had used in 2013. While the composition of the EP was markedly different (two EP elections had since taken place), there were sufficient MEPs and civil society actors present with an institutional memory of the Estrela Report and One of Us to anticipate Christian-Right activism and sound the alarm bells. In addition, Christian-Right actors suffered a significant setback in 2018 with the appearance of the Arte documentary *IVG: Les croisés contre-attaquent* (Jousset and Rawlins-Gaston 2017) and the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights report *Restoring the Natural Order* (Datta 2018), which led to an avalanche of further research and investigative reporting. As a result, Christian-Right actors suffered a significant loss of credibility.

Finally, by 2021, the EP had become a seasoned protagonist in the *gender ideology* battles, as it had adopted several progressive reports prior to the Matic Report. Such reports included the 2019 report on experiencing a backlash in women's rights and gender equality in the EU ("European Parliament resolution of 13 February" 2019) as well as several reports condemning Poland's and Hungary's anti-gender initiatives (e.g., "European Parliament resolution of 8 July" [2021] and "European Parliament resolution of 11 November" [2021]). In the first semester of 2021, this included the EP organizing two special hearings aimed at understanding Christian-Right activism in the EU with the intention of neutralizing it.<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

Scholars and practitioners alike have long overlooked the emergence in Europe of a set of actors that could resemble the US Christian Right. Moreover, most of the literature has focused on the national level, forgetting European institutions, despite their crucial role in the governance of contemporary European

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11 The hearing entitled "Abortion rights and rule of law in Poland" on 24 February 2021 (<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/abortion-rights-and-rule-of-law-in-poland/product-details/20210217CHE08342>) and the Joint FEMM-INGE Public Hearing on "Financing of anti-choice organisations" on 25 March 2021 (<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/joint-femm-inge-public-hearing-on-financ/product-details/20210315CHE08502>).

societies. In this chapter, we have tried to address these gaps through a first mapping of European anti-gender politics. We have presented the main civil society and political actors as well as their strategies and modes of action, followed by a comparison of the trajectories of the two main EP reports on SRHR.

Following the purpose of this book, we have also shown that the label *Christian Right*, which is not common in the literature on anti-gender politics, offers interesting insights into the development of ultraconservative actors in the European bubble. Indeed, it allows us to emphasize that most of these actors claim to be inspired by so-called Christian values and a religious understanding of politics and society. At the same time, it would be misleading to equate these actors with specific churches or religious hierarchies. Rather, their emergence reveals the development of a network of NGOs who use secular tools and human rights language to defend an extremely restricted understanding of SRHR that is inspired by their religious values. They may act relatively independently of religious hierarchies and sometimes even in opposition to them (Prearo 2020). Furthermore, while losing traction among mainstream Christian politicians, these actors find increasing support among alt-, far-, and hard-right political actors, who are known to instrumentalize so-called Christian values to advance their civilizational battles. Finally, it is interesting to observe that these actors manage to build ecumenical bridges across Christian denominations that display complex histories of rivalries and conflicts, but they have not been able to attract other religious actors in Europe, namely Jews and Muslims.

All this draws an entirely new landscape for SRHR in European politics, which has profoundly transformed the action of progressive actors in the European bubble. After a moment of surprise and alarm, they were forced to reorganize, study their Christian-Right opponents, and prepare for the likelihood that their opponents would contest progressive policy claims (Peiro Trapero 2021). By 2021, a new phase has emerged, characterized by progressive and Christian-Right actors engaging in two different theaters. Whereas progressive actors have re-captured their ascendancy in the European bubble, Christian-Right actors have retrenched to the safety of national capitals such as Budapest, London, Madrid, and Warsaw. This strategy allows them, from their national bastions, to pose major obstacles to progressive successes at the level of the EU and the Council of Europe, such as the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, block the everyday functioning of EU institutions in domains crucial for SRHR, and launch some of the most ambitious anti-gender initiatives ever seen in Europe, which, in turn, have earned explicit

condemnation from European institutions. In conclusion, this new and fast-changing political landscape has significantly transformed gender and sexual politics at the European level and will do so for many years to come.

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