



How to counter anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI mobilisation in Hungary and Poland?

Conference summary¹

On June 28, 2022, Political Capital organized an event in partnership with the Budapest Pride Festival to discuss the anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI mobilisation in Hungary and Poland and how to counter it at the civil society, politics, and policy levels.

Bulcsú Hunyadi, Political Capital Senior Analyst and leader of the Far-Right Research Project opened the conference with recognition of the horrible attack on 25 June 2022 at the Oslo Pride festival which killed two people and injured 21 others and stressed the importance of defending LGBTQI rights.

Political Capital analyst Zsuzsa Kelen presented the findings from the research on Hungary and Poland's anti-LGBTQI and anti-gender mobilization. She explained that both governments have a similar political context but differ in their social contexts. Both governments create the narrative that LGBTQI people are enemies which push 'gender and LGBTQI ideology/propaganda'. The government alleges that this 'propaganda' attacks 'normality' which includes conservative values, children, and families.

The first panel of civil society activists discussed the different challenges facing Hungary and Poland in great detail. In 2021 Hungary held its first ever pride march outside of Budapest in Pécs. Poland has held several successful equality parades and marches throughout the country for several years now. Viktória Radványi from Budapest Pride (HU) remarked that the key reason for this difference is that Poland is a much larger country than Budapest and has several major cities that are spread throughout the country. Hungary is more centralized to Budapest. Viktória Radványi said that over the years several new pride groups have formed in other smaller cities in Hungary with universities, but they deal with the constant challenge of losing members because the student involved often leave for Budapest or other European cities when they graduate. Luca Dudits from the Háttér Society (HU) reminded that there are way more factors to account for this than just the LGBTQI movement. Hungary is not as strong as Poland when it comes to protests. However, 3000 people attended the Pécs Pride Festival and 30,000 attended Budapest Pride Festival in 2021. Viktória Radványi pointed out that another significant difference between the situation in Poland vs Hungary is Poland's long-established feminist movement. Hungary has some smaller feminist NGO's but when the Budapest Pride organization has reached out for collaboration they were met with rejection and transphobia.

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When asked if society shapes politics or politics shapes society, the second panel of politicians discussed the reasons for the anti-gender and LGBTQI mobilization. LGBTQI rights were not a topic at all in Poland until 2015 when The Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS) brought this issue to the forefront. Polish MP Monika Rosa from the Nowoczesna party stated that many people attribute this to the influence of the catholic church, which is of course significant, but PiS's motivations are more pragmatic and ideological. The PiS party gets profit from the church for pushing their ideology. Tamás Soproni, Mayor of Budapest's 6th District and member of Momentum also stated that religion is not a sufficient explanation for the mobilization in Hungary either. The mobilization is a strategy to maintain power rather than a representation of these politicians' true beliefs.

The panel discussed everyday strategies that can be done to protect LGBTQI people and activists such as educating and sensitizing their own staff teams to welcome LGBTQI people, physically standing between activists and police at protests to stop arrests, and finding lawyers for those who are arrested for their activism.

Tamás Soproni described that at the political level, Hungary faces a particular set of challenges due to the governments two-thirds majority. He said that the priority for politicians must be to maintain the current status quo so that LGBTQI rights and freedoms are not stripped and restricted any further. As a local politician, Tamás Soproni stated that symbolic changes are possible and helpful to shift the culture and show LGBTQI community members that they are supported. As an example, local politicians can choose the themes for local parks that are inclusive. One of the most significant challenges to LGBTQI acceptance is the banning of LGBTQI and gender education for children in Hungary.

After the oppositions losses in the 2022 Hungarian national election, Tamás Soproni advised to Monika Rosa MP who will be facing a national election in 2023 that to gain support, the opposition must have a vision of the world they want to create to draw voters and to find that the opposition has much more in common than difference.

The political panelists agreed with the civil society panel that the most effective strategy is to combat the narratives of fear and false enemies that are created by the Polish and Hungarian governments. The governments' narratives have created polarization in Hungary in Poland. The civil society panelists agreed that while of course the polarization of society has many negative consequences, it has also bolstered their movements in some ways. It has created an environment where people are either "with us or against us" and previously apathetic people have now joined in support of LGBTQI rights.

All of the panelists spoke about the importance of language in combatting anti-gender and LGBTQI mobilization. In the case of a referendum in Hungary last year, Luca Dudits explained that there was no time to reeducate the society about the problems with the referendum, so they reframed the issue as "do u want to feel safe in your country holding hands with your partner". When the issue became about safety, something that everyone can relate to and care about, the

wider public voted against the referendum and the campaign was ultimately successful for LGBTQI rights.

Both panels discussed what Poland and Hungary can learn from one another. Miłosz Hodun from Projekt: Polska Foundation (PL) pointed out that the Polish and Hungarian governments already exchange ideas and adopt each other's strategies so activists in each country have to look to each other and start to act faster than their governments. Viktória Radványi also expressed that connection between activists can also help sustain movements by preventing burnout and creating community as well as helping with strategy.

Both panels expressed that fear is one of the most harmful impacts of the anti-gender and LGBTQI mobilization in Hungary and Poland. All of the panelists strongly stated that the most effective strategy to countering this mobilization is the use of human stories. Everyone can relate to and support the desire to keep their loved ones and children safe. When LGBTQI people and couples are visible, the governments narrative that they are "ideological", "dangerous" or "enemies" falls away. Tools such as media representation, outreach, rainbow flags, and human stories can combat the culture of fear created by the Polish and Hungarian governments. Monika Rosa closed with the hopeful message, "love wins, sooner or later we will win".