

Anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI mobilisation in Hungary

Evolution, actors, networks

Short report



Manuscript closed: March 2022

Executive Summary

- **The political mobilisation against gender identity and LGBTQI issues in Hungary has consisted of two major phases.¹**
 - The **first phase (2008-2017)** was neither consolidated nor strategic, driven primarily by individual actors rather than a concerted government-led campaign.
 - The **second phase (2017-present)** can be characterised by the conscious and strategic instrumentalisation of these issues by the governing Fidesz party for political advantage. This mobilisation has been well aligned with the government's existing right-wing populist narratives.
- **Anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI legislative policies can be divided into two categories²:**
 - **Preventative acts** intended to stop Hungary from emulating Western liberal policies;
 - **Legislation that curbs acquired rights** or limits their ability to be exercised.
- **The Fidesz government and its proxies (government-organised NGOs, think tanks and media, semi-independent family and anti-abortion organisations and far-right groups) have been the main disseminators of anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI narratives.**
- **The main drivers of international networking are government officials and government-organised NGOs**, with only a limited number of (semi-) independent Hungarian actors being well-embedded in international networks. The main platforms for networking are international events and Hungarian branches of international organisations.
- **Foreign actors and networks give the Hungarian government legitimacy and international recognition**, which Fidesz can then sell to its domestic audience. In return, foreign allies present Hungary as a legitimising ally to their domestic audiences.
- The Hungarian government has strategically established **connections with conservative US actors** to boost its image in the USA and the larger international arena. The leading Hungarian actors with US connections are the Mathias Corvinus Collegium and the Center for Fundamental Rights.
- **Russia has had a clear impact on Hungary's LGBTQI narratives and policies**, including providing a model for the "gay propaganda law" passed under the guise of child protection. While direct connections between Fidesz (and its proxies) and the Russian government were remarkably prominent a few years ago, they have become less prevalent, likely due to increased Hungarian-Western relations. The major exception has been strengthening the relationship between the Hungarian government and the Russian Orthodox Church. Russian media also play a key role in lauding PM Orban and his conservative policies.

¹ Findings regarding the timeline of the mobilisation in Hungary, especially the classification into two phases (before and after 2017) is based on the following work: Kováts, Eszter (2021) *Ellenségkép, hegemonia és reflexió. A gender fogalmának tartalma és funkciója az Orbán-rezsim és a német radikális jobboldal politikájában*. Doctoral thesis. Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Állam- és Jogtudományi Kar Politikatudományi Doktori Iskola

² The classification of Hungarian legislative acts into two categories, preventive and rights-limiting legislation, is based on the following work: Kováts 2021

- **Connections with German actors**³ are currently less important for the Hungarian players than connections with American and regional partners, likely because the relevant German actors have not yet become part of the political mainstream in Germany. However, since gender is one of the focuses of the new German government, the relevance and impact of the anti-gender discourse can increase in the coming years.
- **Poland is Hungary's closest ally vis-à-vis anti-gender mobilisation**, as demonstrated by the increasing cooperation between the Centre for Fundamental Rights and Ordo Iuris. Although Poland is more conservative concerning reproductive rights, when it comes to LGBTQI rights, we can observe similar developments in both Hungary and Poland, with Hungary being more restrictive in some respects and Poland in others.
- **While Poland and Hungary are clear pioneers of anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI policies in the region, some political actors in other countries are open to following suit.** For instance, some MPs in Romania and Slovakia have unsuccessfully attempted to get their parliaments to pass similar "LGBTQI propaganda" laws so far.

³ The presentation of the connections between Hungarian and German anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI actors and the lessons drawn from it are based on Eszter Kováts's dissertation: Kováts 2021

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1. Methodology and acknowledgements

The research aimed to reconstruct the evolution of anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI mobilisation in Hungary and reveal the main domestic actors involved in the mobilisation and their international networks. Through the research, we wanted to understand how the Hungarian anti-gender political agenda came to be and how it was instrumentalised to project power in the domestic and international arena.

For the research, we used qualitative research methodologies. First, we processed the already existing materials (such as articles, studies, etc., including non-public materials) on the Hungarian actors of anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI mobilisation, their activities and their local and international connections. In parallel, we reconstructed the timeline of the mobilisation in Hungary from 2015 until April 2022 by processing all the gender and LGBTQI-labelled contents of a government-organised media outlet. Moreover, we investigated the main anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI actors and events individually. We collected the data into a database that helped identify the main points and actors, such as their connections. In addition, we conducted three interviews to understand personal perspectives and experiences on the topic. Two interviews were conducted with LGBTQI activists, and the third one with a former government representative.

Throughout the work, we closely cooperated with two external experts. An expert on Russia helped us study the Russian-language media and identify Russian-Hungarian connections. At the same time, an investigative journalist supported the research by looking into less transparent ties and actors. Moreover, Milosz Hodun from Projekt:Polska Foundation helped us compare the Polish and Hungarian legal environments.

We owe a debt of gratitude to all our interviewees and partners who supported us throughout the research. However, we especially want to thank three persons (in alphabetical order of their family names): Kata Bálint, an analyst at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue; Eszter Kováts, an academic focusing on anti-gender politics; and Márton Sarkadi Nagy, a journalist at the Hungarian investigative portal Átlátszó. We learned a lot from their works about the Hungarian actors of the mobilisation, their domestic connections and international networks. Moreover, the classification of the anti-gender mobilisation into two phases (before and after 2017) and the categorisation of Hungarian legislative acts into preventive and rights-limiting legislation are from Eszter Kováts's recent PhD dissertation referenced throughout our study. We also heavily relied on her findings regarding the timeline of the mobilisation. Therefore, we owe special thanks to Eszter for giving us access to her yet unpublished work.

In the entire report, references appear as links embedded in the text, except for materials not available online.

2. Evolution of the anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI mobilisation in Hungary⁴

2.1 Phase 1 (2008-2017)⁵

In the first phase, anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI discourse were neither consolidated nor strategic. The issue rarely appeared in the mainstream media in connection with particular events. Its main drivers were certain intellectuals, journalists, religious groups, marginal men's rights blogs and far-right actors.⁶

There are two reasons why gender- and LGBTQI-related discourse was relatively unsystematic between 2008 and 2017. Firstly, the EU and international human rights organisations did not mandate gender mainstreaming (implementing policies that advance gender equality and integrating gender issues into policymaking). Secondly, the conservative Fidesz government, in power since 2010, did not initiate any pro-gender or pro-LGBTQI policies.⁷ Hence, there was no perceived need for counter-mobilisation by conservative and traditionalist actors. To maintain this situation, the Fidesz-dominated parliament passed "preventive"⁸ legislation to stop Hungary from emulating developments in Western countries.⁹ As such, gender and LGBTQI-related topics did not play a crucial role in the Fidesz-led political mobilisation until 2017.

2.2 Phase 2 (2017-present)

The turning point in anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI mobilisation came in 2017¹⁰ when the topic became a key focus of the governing Fidesz party, PM Orban, government-organised NGOs (GONGOs), think tanks and media. Firstly, PM Orban began targeting the Central European University (CEU), founded and funded by George Soros, for its newly accredited gender studies programme. The course accreditation was soon [withdrawn](#), and the term "gender" was removed from the curriculum for all school subjects.

Another primary target of the post-2017 mobilisation was the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, better known as the Istanbul Convention. Due to the GONGO campaign against the convention, Fidesz

⁴ Unless additional reference provided, this chapter, including references, quotations and the classification of the mobilisation's evolution and the legislation is based on the respective chapters of Eszter Kováts's yet unpublished PhD dissertation: Kováts, Eszter (2021) *Ellenségkép, hegemonia és reflexió. A gender fogalmának tartalma és funkciója az Orbán-rezsim és a német radikális jobboldal politikájában*. Doctoral thesis. Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Állam- és Jogtudományi Kar Politikatudományi Doktori Iskola

⁵ Findings regarding the timeline of the mobilisation in Hungary, especially the classification into two phases (before and after 2017) is based on the following work: Kováts 2021

⁶ Kováts 2021

⁷ Kováts 2021: 128.

⁸ The classification of Hungarian legislative acts into two categories, i.e. preventive and rights-limiting legislation, is based on the following work: Kováts 2021

⁹ Kováts 2021: 125; 148

¹⁰ Kováts 2021

officials announced that their government would never ratify the convention, as its actual goal, allegedly, was the abolition of the traditional family and the introduction of countless genders.¹¹

The most striking facet of the political mobilisation against gender and LGBTQI has been the connection between these topics and the protection of children against paedophilia. In June 2021, the parliament passed the Children Protection Act, which initially aimed to safeguard children's wellbeing and combat paedophilia. However, last-minute amendments by Fidesz MPs [transformed](#) it into anti-LGBTQI legislation, prohibiting the portrayal of homosexuality and gender reassignment in content addressed to minors, including school education and television. This so-called "child protection law" was prefaced by several other discriminatory pieces of legislation, including a [ban](#) on same-sex couple adoption and [abolishing](#) the legal recognition of transgender persons' gender.

However, the intentional and strategic media campaign is the most significant characteristic of this phase. Applying the same approach they used when [reporting about refugees and migrants](#), the government-organised media presented events concerning trans and queer issues from Western Europe and North America in a dubious, 'tabloid' and inciting way to provoke indignation, anger and anxiety. Both these media outlets and Fidesz politicians presented individual, often outlying events as widespread, common cases to shock their audience.¹²

3. The role of anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI mobilisation in Hungarian politics

Fidesz's newfound focus on gender and LGBTQI politics since 2017 has been well aligned with its previous patterns of political mobilisation strategies. The formerly liberal Fidesz party became increasingly more populist during the 2000s and has since taken over far-right issues and messaging. Since coming to power with a two-thirds majority in the parliament in 2010, Fidesz has built its politics on the intentional polarisation of society, incitement and exploitation of various anxieties, and the defence of traditional values from both internal and external (often invented) enemies.¹³

Since 2015, Fidesz's politics has primarily centred around an anti-immigration narrative. When the issue began losing some of its popular support in the second half of 2016, the party [singled out](#) a new enemy: philanthropist George Soros due to his open-borders advocacy. Anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI messaging were easy to integrate into the government's existing anti-liberal, anti-West, anti-EU, pro-East, and pro-tradition narratives. As such, gender identity and LGBTQI rights have been presented as a [threat](#) to 1) values, traditions, and culture; 2) traditional

¹¹ Kováts 2021: 132, 136, 158

¹² Kováts 2021: 136

¹³ Kováts 2021: 140; 221; Juhász, Attila (2017) Az átrendeződés éve – A populista jobb és a szélsőjobb a mai Magyarországon, Political Capital, https://www.politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/media/Boell_Szelsojobb_HUN_171220.pdf

families and children; 3) white, Christian civilisation; 4) freedom; 5) majority interests; and 6) the natural order.

4. The legal environment in Hungary

Since coming to power in 2010, the Fidesz-led government has initiated significant changes in the legislative environment to the disadvantage of gender-based and LGBTQI rights. Two categories of legislation¹⁴ can be differentiated.

Firstly, preventative legislative acts that intend to stop “unwanted” social and legal developments that have come to fruition in Western countries from occurring in Hungary. For example, the fourth (2013) amendment to the Fundamental law defined marriage and family in an exclusionary way, while the ninth (2020) amendment defined the mother as a woman, the father as a man, and prescribed a child’s right “to identify with their gender.”

Secondly, legislation that intends to curb existing rights or establish new barriers to their exercise. These include abolishing the legal recognition of transgender persons’ gender and the practical ban on adoption by same-sex couples, enacted in 2020.

4.1 Comparing Hungarian and Russian “gay propaganda laws”

Hungary’s so-called “child protection law” is strikingly similar to [Russia’s infamous “gay propaganda law.”](#) Both laws [use](#) the pretext of protecting children and traditional family values to curb LGBTQI rights. Both laws also prohibit a wide range of information, banning all types and media forms of LGBTQI-related content and information. Another similarity is the intentionally [vague phrasing](#) of the prohibitions, which provides ample room for arbitrary enforcement and encourages self-censorship.

However, unlike the 2013 Russian law, Hungarian legislation explicitly connects homosexuality to paedophilia by banning LGBTQI-related education and media content through a law initially intended to prevent child abuse. As such, Hungarian government officials [claim](#) that the prohibition does not extend to consenting adults.

4.2 Comparing Hungarian and Polish LGBTQI legislation

In general, Poland’s gender, LGBTQI, and reproductive policies have been more restrictive due to the governing party’s strong conservatism and the critical role of the Catholic Church in Polish society, particularly concerning abortion and IVF.

Nevertheless, regarding LGBTQI rights, we can observe similar developments in Hungary and Poland, with Hungary being more restrictive in some respects and Poland in others. The two countries are equally restrictive regarding policies intended to limit [same-sex adoption](#) and the [legal recognition of gender change](#). Poland has been more restrictive regarding [same-sex civil unions](#) and the establishment of so-called “[LGBT-free zones](#)” in certain municipalities. Hungary

¹⁴ The classification of Hungarian legislative acts into two categories (preventive and rights-limiting legislation) is based on the following work: Kováts 2021

has been more restrictive regarding LGBTQI-related content and education for minors, a topic that has largely been put on ice in Poland.

5. Key actors¹⁵

5.1 The government and governing Fidesz party¹⁶

The Hungarian governing party, Fidesz, has been the leading actor and main organiser of Hungary's anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI mobilisation. In one way or another, it supports almost all the other key actors, providing funds, organising events, shaping public discourse, enacting policies, building partnerships, and founding new organisations. The essential Fidesz figures are:

- **Katalin Novak** – Head of Cabinet of the Ministry of Human Resources (2012-2014), State Secretary for Family and Youth Affairs at the Ministry of Human Capacities (2014-2020), Vice-President of Fidesz (2017-2021), Minister for Family Affairs (2020-2021), and current President-elect. She has been the face of the “family-friendly Hungary” programme and actively networked with other anti-gender and anti-LGBTQ actors, both locally and internationally. Novak has served as both the vice-president and president of the Political Network for Values, an international umbrella organisation. In 2015 she hosted the I. Demographic Forum, which attracted numerous international participants active in the anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI mobilisation, including Igor Beloborodov, Luca Volonte, Patrick Fagan, and Jaime Mayor Oreja. She has given opening and closing speeches at the international anti-abortion One of Us conferences and participated in several World Congress of Families (WCF) events (see more below). She has also been actively involved in the organisation and hosting several Demographic Summits in Budapest that attracted high-profile guests such as Mike Pence,¹⁷ Aleksander Vucic, and Andrej Babis.
- **Zoltan Balog** – Minister of Human Resources (2012-2018) and Calvinist pastor. He is primarily involved in Fidesz's gender policies. Like Katalin Novak, Balog has participated in the I Transatlantic Summit, where the Political Network for Values was founded, WCF events, and several Demographic Summits. As the Minister of Human Resources, he played a critical role in abolishing the [gender studies](#) master's programme in Hungary.¹⁸
- **Laszlo Kover** – founding member of Fidesz and Speaker of the National Assembly of Hungary (2010-2022). He has been a vocal opponent of [gender studies](#), [transgender individuals](#), and [same-sex couples](#).

¹⁵ Besides our own research on Hungarian actors and their activities, we especially relied on the investigations of Kata Bálint and Márton Sarkadi Nagy (in alphabetical order of their family names), as well as Eszter Kováts, when writing up this chapter.

¹⁶ When creating our categories, we built on the categorisation by Eszter Kováts. See Kováts 2021:16

¹⁷ Mike Pence is a politician, broadcaster and lawyer, he was the vice-president of the USA between 2017-2021.

¹⁸ Kováts 2021

5.2 Government-organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs) and think tanks

Although these organisations present themselves as independent, autonomous organisations, they have been either directly or indirectly established, organised and financed by the Fidesz government.

- The **Center for Fundamental Rights (CfFR)** is one of the most significant Hungarian actors nationally and internally and [receives substantial state funding](#).¹⁹ The organisation that operates CfFR, Rule of Law and Justice Nonprofit Ltd, was co-founded by its current director Miklos Szantho. Its activities include publishing literature, producing videos and a radio programme, national and international networking, and media appearances, all supporting government interests and initiatives. For instance, it has launched an [online campaign](#) to support the government’s so-called child protection referendum.
- The **Safe Society Foundation (SSF)** was [founded](#) as a counterpoint to George Soros’ Open Society Foundation, with the goal of fighting organisations that promote abortion and LGBTQI ideologies. SSF’s primary function is shaping public discourse by organising panel discussions, publishing opinion pieces, and appearing in Fidesz-sponsored media. SSF has set up a legal unit, the [Budapest Committee](#), as a counterpoint to the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, one of the country’s oldest, most prominent, and best-known human rights NGOs. One of its leaders, Laszlo Foldi, is a frequent guest at Fidesz-organised cable news channels. The organisation also has ties to the far-right: its social media manager Tamas Horvath was once a neo-Nazi²⁰ [activist](#) and editor-in-chief of the ultraconservative online news portal [vasarnap.hu](#).
- The **Szent Istvan Institute** was founded as an NGO and [aimed to](#) shape public discourse based on Judeo-Christian social teachings. The Institute has been a significant supporter of the so-called anti-LGBTQI child protection law, and its leader, Zsuzsa Mathe is a frequent guest at government-sponsored media outlets. They have also organised two conferences where the speakers included Fidesz government members.

5.3 Media

Government-organised and far-right media outlets serve as a critical platform for the anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI actors described above. The former has a particularly powerful impact on public attitudes, regularly publishing content intended to provoke indignation, anger, and anxiety. The primary examples are 888, vasarnap.hu, Pesti TV/Pesti Srácok, Origó, M5, Mandiner, and HírTV.

5.4 Intellectuals

Intellectuals legitimise other actors’ mobilisation efforts by providing a pseudo-scientific background through studies, books, articles, and “expert” media appearances. The most prominent anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI intellectual is **Gergely Szilvay**, a journalist at the Fidesz-

¹⁹ Between 2013 and 2020 [it got](#) more than 2 billion forints, and ~870 million forints from unnamed sources.

²⁰ Or rather, Neo-Arrow Cross. The Arrow Cross Party – Hungarist Movement was a national socialist party in the 1930s and ‘40s, modelled by Nazism and Fascism.

aligned news portal Mandiner and associate researcher at the [government-funded Rubicon Institute](#). He has been active in the anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI mobilisation for many years. In 2012, he was the copy editor of the Hungarian edition of Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira's book "Revolution and Counter-Revolution", published by the Vienna subdivision of [Tradition, Family and Property](#), a traditionalist Catholic movement. He has also worked at the online Catholic news portal Magyar Kurir. His books on [gay marriage](#) and [gender theory](#) have been published by the Center for Fundamental Rights. Lastly, he regularly conducts interviews with like-minded actors from abroad and frequently appears at [religious conferences](#).

5.5 Family, youth, and anti-abortion organisations

These actors primarily represent the civic background of the mobilisation and play an essential role in proliferating anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI propaganda under the guise of family protection. They are typically state funded to some degree, and many have ties to president-elect Novak and one another.

- The **Association of Hungarian Women** was founded by Ilona Ekes, a former Fidesz politician and vocal opponent of homosexuality, [particularly Pride celebrations](#). They are most [involved in](#) organising roundtable discussions with various GONGO speakers.
- **Together for Life Association** and the **Human Dignity Center** are anti-abortion and anti-LGBTQI organisations founded and led by **Edit Frivaldszky**.²¹ She is very active both domestically and internationally, particularly concerning the [issue](#) of gender identity.²²
- The **Kopp Maria Institute for Demography and Families** [was established](#) by the Hungarian government to support the work of the Minister of Families.

5.6 Far-right actors

Far-right activists and organisations have pioneered the anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI mobilisation since the early 2000s. They played an essential role in building awareness of these issues and have since consistently worked to create the "[social demand](#)" that legitimises government policies. They are also deeply embedded in national and international anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI networks.

- **Imre Teglasz** is a religious fundamentalist and foetal protection, anti-abortion, and anti-LGBTQI activist. He is the leader of [Alfa Alliance](#), one of the oldest anti-abortion organisations that also works to organise anti-LGBTQI events.
- **Edda and Gyorgy Budahazy** are best known for disrupting LGBTQI events and abortion efforts.
- **Tamas Gaudi-Nagy** is another central figure in the anti-gender campaign. As a lawyer, he plays an essential role in providing legal assistance to other far-right activists.

²¹ Institute for Strategic Dialogue (2021) Anti-SRHR movements in Central Europe: Hungary. Manuscript

²² Institute for Strategic Dialogue (2021) Anti-SRHR movements in Central Europe: Hungary. Manuscript

- The **Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement (HVIM)** and **Legio Hungaria (LH)** are street activists that have been the main organisers of anti-Pride march protests. They also disrupt LGBTQI events, damage posters, and publicise the names of schoolteachers who support LGBTQI rights.
- **Identity Generation (IG)** is the Hungarian branch of the pan-European Identarian movement, focused on anti-LGBTQI provocation efforts.
- **Our Homeland Movement (MHM)** is an offshoot of the far-right Jobbik party that continues propagating its far-right agenda.

5.7 Religious organisations

Religious organisations connected to the Catholic Church played a significant role in the mobilisation in its early stages (the late 2000s and early 2010s).²³ Since then, however, their activity has decreased substantially due to Pope Francis' more moderate stance and the strength of the government's aggressive campaign. Some Church officials and religious organisations that continue to be active in the anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI mobilisation are **Zoltan Osztie, the Hungarian Foundation for Christian Civilisation, Daniel Fulep, and the Fraternity for a Sacred Hungary.**

6. International connections and coalition-building²⁴

This section describes Hungarian actors' international connections and activities in anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI mobilisation. The leading Hungarian actors involved in international networking are government-organised NGOs and think tanks, certain government members, and some independent or semi-independent actors. These international connections and coalitions play a central role in legitimising government action. Their presence is portrayed as a sign of international support behind the government's (sometimes widely criticised) policies. It is particularly beneficial for the Fidesz government because it allows president-elect Novak to advertise and popularise the party's "family-friendly" platform internationally.

6.1 Hungarian actors in the international network of anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI organisations

6.1.1 Government-organised NGOs and think tanks with international connections

The **Political Network for Values (PNfV)** is another international umbrella organisation of anti-abortion, anti-LGBTQI, Christian, and pro-family NGOs and activists from the Spanish-

²³ Kováts, Eszter (2021) *Ellenségkép, hegemonia és reflexió. A gender fogalmának tartalma és funkciója az Orbán-rezsim és a német radikális jobboldal politikájában*. Doctoral thesis. Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Állam- és Jogtudományi Kar Politikatudományi Doktori Iskola.

²⁴ Besides our own research on Hungarian actors' international connections, we heavily relied on the investigations of Kata Bálint and Márton Sarkadi Nagy (in alphabetical order of their family names), when writing up this chapter.

speaking countries of Europe and the Americas.²⁵ PNfV’s leadership consists mainly of active and former right-wing politicians and other decision-makers.²⁶ The organisation has a Hungarian subdivision, has organised events in Budapest, and has hosted Katalin Novak and other conservative Hungarian figures as speakers. PNfV has a broad international network²⁷, with [ties](#) to organisations such as Alliance Defending Freedom,²⁸ World Congress of Families, CitizenGo, and the National Organisation for Marriage.²⁹ It has organised the bi-yearly [Transatlantic Summits](#) and [Transatlantic Webinars](#).

The **Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC)** participates in anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI mobilisation by granting generous fellowships or speaking invitations to like-minded international actors³⁰. It has hosted: Tucker Carlson at its [MCC Feszt](#); Paul Coleman,³¹ Sophia Kuby,³² Gladden Pappin,³³ and Luca Volonte at the [MCC Budapest Summit](#); Jaime Major Oreja, Gregor Puppinc,³⁴ and Luca Volonte at its [Patriotic Talks](#) lecture series; Marion Marechal Le Pen at the [Budapest Lectures](#). MCC has also built relationships with conservative educational institutions throughout Europe. MCC’s international director, Dora Szucs, participated in a conference hosted by the Collegium Intermarium, a higher educational institution closely related to the Polish ultraconservative organisation Ordo Iuris. Marion Marechal Le Pen has also [expressed](#) an interest in cooperation between MCC and her [Institut des Sciences Sociales, Economiques et Politiques](#).

6.1.2 Hungarian government officials with international connections

Former Minister for Family Affairs and President-elect **Katalin Novak** and Former Minister of Human Resources and current Reformist Bishop **Zoltan Balog** are the two government members who are most actively involved in international networking. Novak has led the [Political Network for Values](#) (PNfV) as its vice-president and president, providing a solid foundation for further international networking. She has been organising and speaking at international anti-abortion and “traditional family” events, including the Demographic Summits and [One of Us conferences](#). Both Novak and Balog spoke at numerous WCF events. Novak has claimed that such invitations can be considered a testament to Hungary’s “international recognition” regarding its family policy measures.

²⁵ Institute for Strategic Dialogue (2021) Anti-SRHR movements in Central Europe: Hungary. Manuscript

²⁶ Institute for Strategic Dialogue (2021) Anti-SRHR movements in Central Europe: Hungary. Manuscript

²⁷ Institute for Strategic Dialogue (2021) Anti-SRHR movements in Central Europe: Hungary. Manuscript

²⁸ Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) is [an anti-LGBTQI hate group, one of the most active](#) US Christian Rights organisations involved in anti-gender activism in Europe

²⁹ National Organisation for Marriage aims to oppose state legislation allowing same-sex marriage in the United States. The president of the organisation is Brian Brown, who [fights against](#) same-sex marriage.

³⁰ Institute for Strategic Dialogue (2021) Anti-SRHR movements in Central Europe: Hungary. Manuscript

³¹ Paul Coleman is the [Executive Director of ADF](#).

³² Sophia Kuby is the Director of Strategic Relations and Training of Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), [an anti-LGBTQI hate group, one of the most active](#) US Christian Rights organisations involved in anti-gender activism in Europe.

³³ Gladden Pappin is Christian-Conservative political scientist, university professor and guest lecturer at the Mathias Corvinus Collegium from Autumn 2021.

³⁴ Grégor Puppinc is the director of European Centre for Law and Justice, an [influential ultra-conservative organisation](#) that has its roots in the United States, founded in the 1990s.

6.1.3 Hungarian independent actors with international connections

The **Danube Institute** is a conservative think tank [focused on research that will](#) advance current thinking within conservatism and democratic nationalism within Central Europe and between Central Europe and the rest of the English-speaking world. Its President, [John O’Sullivan](#), is the former special adviser to Margaret Thatcher. So far, the Institute has few international connections and has primarily collaborated with the MCC in hosting several notable international actors at their lecture series, [Patriotic Talks](#).

The [European Family Science Society \(EFSS\)](#), a central branch of the [Family Science Alliance \(FSA\)](#), advocates for “traditional” family and gender values. The organisation has participated in [several](#) international Demographic Summits and the Budapest Family Summit. Both EFSS and FSA are [members of the international Empowered Youth Coalition](#), alongside CitizenGo. In 2021, FSA organised a [conference](#) on the traditional family model, hosting international speakers like Brian S. Brown, Patrick Fagan, Gabriele Kiby, and Sharon Slater.

Edit Frivaldszky is a “family protection” activist, [founder](#) and leader of the Hungarian branch of CitizenGo, and founder of the anti-abortion Together for Life Association. She has attended at least [three WCF summits](#) and has participated in numerous international events focused on the suppression of LGBTQI and reproductive rights. She [was involved in](#) creating the One of Us anti-abortion initiative at the [European Federation](#) in Rome. Her organisation, Together for Life Association, was the [only Hungarian actor](#) to be involved in the subsequent unsuccessful One of US European Citizens Initiative. Her other organisation, the Human Dignity Center, has joined two [international initiatives](#) of the Center for Fundamental Rights and Polish Ordo Iuris.

Imre Teglasz, a far-right anti-abortion activist and leader of the Alfa Alliance, is the Hungarian representative of two international organisations: [Human Life International](#), a US-based Roman Catholic anti-abortion organisation, and UK-based [Knights Templar International](#), a militant Christian group.

6.2 International actors with reach into Hungary

The **World Congress of Families (WCF)** is an umbrella organisation that advocates for restrictions on LGBTQI and women’s reproductive rights under the guise of protecting the “natural family”: heterosexual married couples and their children. It has extensive connections across European and American far-right communities and several major religious organisations like the [Russian Orthodox Church](#) and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Konstantin Malofeyev, Alexey Komov and Vladimir Yakunin are essential actors for the organisation in Russia and provide Kremlin-adjacent support internationally. Malofeyev and Komov forged ties with the organisation in the years before its 2010s revival; since its founding, allegedly through cooperation between US and Russian pseudo-sociology and the Russian Orthodox Church in the 1990s, it had drifted into obscurity.

CitizenGo is a Spanish [ultra-Catholic organisation](#) and a central hub for conservative activists from [more than 50 countries](#). It began as a project of the Spanish ultraconservative “family values” organisation HazteOír. It has regularly organised and sponsored international events like the World Congress of Families and the Transatlantic Summit. The organisation has a Hungarian branch that was [founded](#) and has been led by Edit Frivaldszky. The organisation’s

[campaign coordinator](#) is Eszter Schittl-Zaymus, [former director](#) of the Human Dignity Center, one of Edit Frivaldszky's other organisations. CitizenGo Hungary is active in writing [petitions](#), some of which have been adopted from the [international](#) CitizenGo portal, as well as co-organising events [with Hungarian organisations](#) like Together for Life Association and Youth in the Service of Life.³⁵

Tradition, Family and Property (TFP) is a [traditionalist Catholic movement](#) founded in Brazil that has campaigned against LGBTQI and reproductive rights since the 1960s. It has connections to the US Republican Party and [European conservative organisations](#), including CitizenGo and Agenda Europe in Hungary and Ordo Iuris in Poland. TFP attempted to [establish a more permanent presence](#) in Hungary in 2015 when the Polish TFP subdivision Piotr Skarga Association founded an organisation in Hungary, the Hungarian Foundation for Christian Civilisation. The foundation has collaborated with several Hungarian far-right actors, including the Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement, to organise an [anti-abortion protest](#) at the Polish Embassy in Budapest and several [conferences](#). However, due to ideological competitors and financial disagreements with the Polish branch, TFP's Hungarian branch has mainly been inactive since 2020.

6.3 Hungarian-U.S. Connections

Hungary and PM Orban have become a significant point of reference for US conservatives, particularly concerning family- and gender-related policies. These strategic relationships enhance the Hungarian government's international image and help counterbalance domestic criticism of autocratic policies and corruption.

The Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC) and the Center for Fundamental Rights (CfFR) are the two vital Hungarian actors building and facilitating connections to US actors. An essential activity of MCC is to invite US (and other foreign) intellectuals (university professors, authors, journalists, and media personalities) to Hungary as guest lecturers and generously funded fellows. The CfFR, on the other hand, has [ties](#) to the Republican Party. With the American Conservative Union considering Hungary to be the [leading force of conservatism in Europe](#), plans have been made for the CfFR [to host](#) the biggest Republican annual event, the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC).

Conservative US actors with connections to Hungary include media personalities Dennis Prager, Tucker Carlson, Rod Dreher, Steve Bannon; political scientists Gladden Pappin and Patrick J. Deneen; authors David Reaboi and Sohrab Ahmari. The National Conservatism Conference is expected to host Deputy Minister of the Prime Minister's Office, Balazs Orban, as a speaker.

- **Dennis Prager** is a conservative radio talk show host, writer, and founder of the media company PragerU. He was a speaker at the joint MCC-Danube Institute [Patriotic Talks](#) series and at MCC's 2021 [summer festival](#), where he [spoke](#) on the media and freedom of speech.
- **Tucker Carlson** is a well-known conservative TV host on Fox News. He has [spoken](#) at the aforementioned MCC summer festival and has conducted an exclusive [interview](#) with PM Orban.

³⁵ Institute for Strategic Dialogue (2021) Anti-SRHR movements in Central Europe: Hungary. Manuscript

- **Rod Dreher** is a senior editor and blogger at The American Conservative. Dreher was a guest lecturer at MCC in 2021, financed by the Danube Institute. His pieces are regularly published on the Hungarian online news portal Mandiner, and he has been a [vocal supporter](#) of the Hungarian anti-LGBTQI “child protection” law.
- **Steve Bannon** is the founder of the media company Breitbart and former strategic advisor to Donald Trump. Bannon is a vocal supporter of the Hungarian government and has personally met with PM Orban. Ahead of the 2019 EP elections, he [founded](#) an umbrella organisation, “The Movement”, to support and coordinate the campaign of the anti-EU, far-right, and populist parties across the EU.
- **The National Conservatism Conference** is [organised](#) by the Edmund Burke Foundation, with participation from the head of the Danube Institute, John O’Sullivan. The [conference aims](#) to form a transatlantic coalition of national conservatives committed to defending the independent nation-state. Speakers will [include](#) Hungary’s Deputy Minister of the Prime Minister’s Office, Balazs Orban.

6.4 Hungarian-Russian Connections

With Russia positioning itself as the leader of countries that adhere to illiberal values, it is no surprise that Russian state-sponsored media presents PM Orban as a protector of Hungarian values and applauds his resistance to European liberalism. Russian media narratives often portray the EU as a political behemoth that seeks to [undermine Hungarian sovereignty](#) and forcefully impose the will of the LGBTQI minority. Furthermore, Political Capital’s 2016 [investigation](#) found that the Kremlin’s illiberal, ultraconservative agenda was actively propagated in Hungary by far-right organisations and the governing Fidesz party and its proxies, i.e. government-organised NGOs, think tanks and media.

In 2014, Hungary was the only EU member state [represented](#) by a government member at the World Congress of Families (WCF) hosted by Russia. Due to the Russian annexation of Crimea and US sanctions, the WCF nominally pulled out of the conference, although the event was a WCF summit in [all but name](#). Although Katalin Novak was initially [intended](#) to be the Hungarian representative, the role was delegated to the deputy secretary at the Ministry of Human Resources, Gergely Prohle.

In 2015, Budapest hosted the [Demographic Summit](#), which was attended by Hungarian anti-LGBTQI and anti-women’s rights organisations, and [Kremlin-linked](#) pro-life activist Igor Beloborodov. Beloborodov connected the WCF with Orthodox Cleric Archpriest Dmitriy Smirnov, who in turn [introduced](#) the WCF to its future Russian representative and seemingly the instigator of its post-2012 revitalisation Aleksey Komov. Katalin Novak [expressed](#) her gratitude to Beloborodov for his networking initiative.

The public relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the Hungarian government began in 2012 when the latter signed an agreement with the Hungarian diocese of the ROC. Since then, the Moscow Patriarchate has been very [vocal](#) in expressing its support of Hungary’s effort to protect traditional family and moral values. Metropolitan Hilarion, Chairman

of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, has met with PM Orban, and Patriarch Kirill has received Zoltan Balog and Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjen. In 2016, Hungary's State Secretary of the Ministry of Human Resources Miklos Soltesz and the head of the Hungarian diocese of the Moscow Patriarchate signed an agreement on the [allocation of funds](#) for the restoration of the Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Budapest. A further boost to ROC-Hungarian relations was provided when PM Orban [initiated talks](#) with church hierarchs about the plight of Christians in the Middle East, an initiative also personally supported by Vladimir Putin.

6.5 Hungarian-German Connections³⁶

The most critical German actor is **Gabriele Kuby**, a sociologist whose books – inspired by Traditional Catholic ideas and orthodox positions – are translated into Hungarian and are available in Hungary free of charge. Another key figure is **Gotz Kubitschek**, a publicist, journalist, and far-right activist who has been repeatedly invited to [speak](#) in Hungary. **Birgit Kelle**, a member of the biggest German conservative party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), has also [spoken](#) extensively against gender identity issues in Hungary. Far-right political scientist and author **Benedikt Kaiser** regularly praises Orban's statements on gender ideology and has been published in the Hungarian *Kommentar* newspaper.

6.5 Regional Connections

Poland is Hungary's closest regional ally regarding anti-gender and anti-LGBTQI mobilisation. The two countries cooperate most directly through the [partnership agreement](#) between the **Center for Fundamental Rights** and **Ordo Iuris** (an ultra-conservative Polish legal think tank), which involves joint lobbying and advocacy against EU gender- and LGBTQI-related initiatives. Their first collective action was the international "[petition against EU accession to the Istanbul Convention](#)" in 2020, joined by 20 like-minded organisations from Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, and the Human Dignity Center, Edit Frivaldszky's organisation. This action was followed by a joint petition, "[Say no to redefining parenthood](#)," which was supported by pro-family communities from France, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Ukraine. Moreover, in 2021, Ordo Iuris and the CfFR jointly organised the [Geneva Consensus Declaration Intermarium Regional Conference](#) in support of the 2020 [anti-abortion declaration](#), which was signed by 30 largely illiberal or authoritarian governments, with core supporters like [Brazil, Egypt, Hungary, Indonesia, and Uganda](#), along with [Russia](#) and the [US](#) (which later [withdrew](#)). The same year, the two organisations founded a [pan-European conservative think-tank network](#), the [Alliance for the Common Good](#) (ACG). Its members include conservative organisations like Slovakia's [Human Rights and Family Policy Institute](#), Czech Republic's [Alliance Pro Rodinu](#), and Italy's [Nazione Future](#). Also, in 2021, Ordo Iuris [announced](#) a new higher educational institution, the Collegium Intermarium (CI) (formally founded by Education to Values Foundation)³⁷, that has [partnered](#) with Marion Marechal Le Pen's

³⁶ This chapter is based on Eszter Kováts's yet unpublished PhD dissertation, unless additional reference is provided. Kováts 2021

³⁷ Institute for Strategic Dialogue (2021) Anti-SRHR movements in Central Europe: Collegium Intermarium. Manuscript

ISSEP. Representatives of the Hungarian government,³⁸ CfFR,³⁹ MCC,⁴⁰ and the Danube Institute⁴¹ have consistently attended CI-organised conferences, along with key international figures.⁴²

Croatia and **Slovenia** have supported Hungary's anti-LGBTQI "gay propaganda" law by [affirming](#) Hungary's right to enact such a measure and refusing to join [18 other European Union member states](#) condemning the law. MPs in [Romania](#) and [Slovakia](#) went even further by submitting very similar drafts of child protection laws to their parliaments.

³⁸Gergely Gulyas, Minister of the Prime Minister's Office; Gergely Ekler, Secretary of State at Ministry of Family; Balazs Orban, Minister of State at the Hungarian Prime Minister's Office, Chairman of the Board of Trustees at MCC

³⁹ Miklós Szánthó, István Kovács

⁴⁰ András Láncki, the rector of MCC and also a lecturer at CI; Dóra Szűcs, international director

⁴¹ John O'Sullivan, president

⁴² Gladden Pappin, Grégor Puppink, Marion Maréchal Le Pen, Francesco Giubilei, Patrick Deneen, Rod Dreher