



# OUTSOURCING AUTOCRATIC ANTI- LGBTI SOFT POWER

The Case Of Russia In Hungary

RÉMY BONNY

## A THREAT TO NATIONAL SECURITY AND EUROPE'S FIGHT FOR LGBTI-EQUALITY.

Autocracy and soft power - for the past three decades they did not seem to go hand in hand. Nevertheless - the last decade has proven that populist and illiberal forces in the democratic West are prone to policies undertaken by illiberal autocratic states. In the eyes of Russian policy-makers - the demographic decline in Russia and the world possesses 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. This research reveals that the Russian Federation has set up a well-thought soft power strategy regarding LGBTI-rights towards the democratic West. Via outsourcing their soft power to the already existing international anti-LGBTI movement, the Kremlin was able to create a network of (financial and ideological) support for possible cooperation between Russian and European policy-makers. This network seems to fit within the Kremlin's broader foreign policy of undermining Western liberal democracies.

By taking a closer look to the Hungarian and Russian involvement within international anti-LGBTI organisations - like the World Congress of Families - the author of this research was able to prove close and structural ties between high-level Hungarian and Russian government officials and oligarchs. The Hungarian government increased the homo- and transphobic political discourse, enforced policies to foster traditional family values and vetoed every pro-LGBTI rights policy proposal in the Council of the European Union since its involvement in the international anti-LGBTI movement.

**Rémy Bonny** is a Belgian political scientist. Over the years he has been gaining expertise in LGBTI-politics in Central and Eastern Europe. In January 2019, Bonny revealed testimonials about a new LGBTI purge in Chechnya. Behind the scenes he also lobbies at the highest levels of several Western governments to raise attention for the dangers of homo- and transphobic governments on world politics. Bonny has been commenting on several LGBTI-related events for many international media.

# CONTENTS

**2 INTRODUCTION**  
Homophobia As A Tool For Autocracies

**6 AUTOCRATIC SOFT POWER**  
Ontological Security & The Global Right

**14 RUSSIA'S SOFT & SEXUAL POWER**  
In Search Of An Identity

**19 HUNGARIAN - RUSSIAN RELATIONS**  
The Christian-Soviet Paradox

**23 INTERNATIONAL ANTI-LGBTI NETWORK**  
The Intertwinning Between Russia And Hungary Via These Networks

**31 CONCLUSION**  
The International Enemies Of The LGBTI-movement

*HOMOPHOBIA AS A TOOL FOR AUTOCRACIES*

# INTRODUCTION

In the early evening of a Monday in February, I enter Bem Cinema in Budapest. Háttér Társaság - a local Hungarian LGBTI-organisation - invited me to give a lecture on my research and advocacy work for the LGBTI-community in Central and Eastern Europe. When I was setting up my presentation, two police officers entered the venue. They came to “check if everything was ok”. One of the LGBTI-activists present during my lecture told me it happens almost every time. “While we don’t ask for their support and we don’t even expect any problems, they just show up. It is to show that they follow us and that they know what we are doing.”

This research questions the definition of 'soft power' as posed by Joseph Nye in 2004. Nye considers soft power as a tool to influence other countries via attraction - which is most successfully used by liberal democracies. The rise of populism in recent decades ultimately questions this statement. With Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orban openly referring to Putin's illiberal democracy model as the desired state model (Orban,2014), one must redefine 'soft power' not just as a tool of liberal democracies, but also of autocratic so-called 'illiberal' states. While liberal soft power grows organically, autocratic soft power is a well-thought foreign policy strategy.

This paper argues that the fight against LGBTI-rights is an important part of Russia's 'soft power'. Therefore they have set up a rather unconventional 'soft power'-strategy of outsourcing the execution of their strategy to international non-governmental organisations by both financially and intellectually supporting them.

The whole idea behind setting up such a 'soft power'-strategy is being explained by the Ontological Security Theory (OST). Both Russia and Hungary face a demographic decline. This raises existential questions on the future strength of these nations. Russia sees the decline of traditional family values and the improvement of the rights of sexual minorities as a cause behind this 'demographic winter'. Therefore, it set up a wide range of policies - which also involve foreign policies. Russia is using its autocratic soft power to fight the external threat of LGBTI-rights. Hungary has shown to be attracted by traditional family values ideas.

While the LGBTI-community and its demands increased its visibility on a world level, the debate on homosexuality in a big part of the world also became more fierce. While many countries started to legalise same-sex marriage in the West and Latin America, countries like the Russian Federation started to implement homophobic legislation. Far-right and religious groups in the USA started to organise themselves against non-traditional families.

These evolutions created a network of transnational anti-LGBTI organisations. The most crucial organisation within this network is the World Congress of Families. These networks do not just gather homophobic tools but are part of a geopolitical toolbox of so-called illiberal states like the Russian Federation. More prominent countries have been very present within these organisations, but also smaller countries were prone to active participation within these networks.

This case study investigates whether or not the soft power strategy of the Russian Federation effectively created a network that can via 'affective power' impact decision-making concerning LGBTI-equality.

The assumption will be made and argued that there is on-going coordination between high-level Hungarian government officials and people very close to the Russian government regarding LGBTI-rights

For Russia, homophobia is not just a thing of traditional family values - it is also a political strategy. Even a geopolitical strategy. In their references to 'Gayropa', Russian media and government officials link the deterioration of a strong nation-state with the changes in the definition of a traditional family in Europe. Religion plays a vital role in Russia's contemporary society; therefore, the Russian Orthodox Church directs the governments' stances on LGBTI-rights. Besides that, one could state that Russia's state homophobia is used to consolidate power by the Russian political elite. By creating an internal enemy, Russian government officials consolidate their power. Without them in power, the Russian state would get undermined by a 'European conspiracy', they believe (Ayoub, 2016; Kon, 2010).

Russia is not only using its soft power to slow down or stop the progress the LGBTI-movement made in its neighbourhood - it is also using the LGBTI-movement as a geopolitical tool to be perceived as culturally superior to The West (Kreko et al., 2016, 5-6).

Via the World Congress of Families, Russia has set up an international network to support governments and NGOs around the globe in their fight against, among other things, but most importantly, LGBTI-rights. Especially since 2014, several heads of government have participated in the conference as keynote speakers: Viktor Orban (Hungary), Igor Dodon (Moldova) and Matteo Salvini (Italy).

Hungary was the first-ever EU member state to send official government representatives to a World Congress of Families-related event in the Russian Federation. Since 2011 they are openly participating. Miklós Soltész - in his capacity as State Secretary for Family and Social Affairs - took part in several conferences affiliated to the World Congress of Families between 2011 and 2014. His successor Katalin Novak took over this role in 2014. Since then she has been participating almost every year in the annual summits of the World Congress of Families. In 2017, Novak organised the World Congress of Families annual summit in Budapest.

Important to note is that while the World Congress of Families is of geopolitical importance to Russia, it was founded in 1997 in the United States of America. This is why this research speaks about 'outsourcing soft power' to already existing international movements. The USA only started to change its legislation on the LGBTI-community with the first Barack Obama administration. Under this

administration, the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'-law was repealed - which prevented LGBTI-soldiers from being open about their sexuality. It was also under the reign of President Obama that the Supreme Court nation-wide introduced marriage equality in 2015. When Donald Trump took over the presidency, the perception of the White House towards LGBTI-people changed. So the World Congress of Families was able to increase its influence on decision-making in the USA. WCF-president Brian Brown has close ties to the American Alt-Right (Open Democracy, 2019).

What this research will not do is assuming that the Russians are waging their possibility to influence concerning LGBTI-issues towards Hungary. It will only prove whether or not a transnational network is set up with the help of the Russian Federation wherein possible influence can be waged. Soft power influence is hard to examine. Nevertheless, this paper will show the links, whether or not the Hungarian government and the Russian government cooperate on LGBTI-rights, but it does not provide practical prove for so-called 'sharp power'-influence. This research does not speak about election interference nor specific propaganda tools. To investigate such a thing, until now, unconventional research methods would be necessary - something that is not possible within the scope of this academic research. Therefore the focus is on the 'soft power'-relationship between Moscow and Budapest.

Through expert interviews, I will examine whether or not the possible lack of awareness of international cooperation from the Hungarian governments forms an imminent threat towards LGBTI-equality in Hungary. To map the possible influence these cooperations might have had, I will not only look to domestic LGBTI-politics in Hungary but also how Hungarian government officials behave in international institutions like the Council of the European Union.

This paper will examine the institutions set up on an international level to wage homophobic policies and their connections to Hungary.

*ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY AND THE GLOBAL RIGHT*

# AUTOCRATIC SOFT POWER

This study is not only embedded within the scholarship of LGBTI-politics but should also be seen as an assessment within the scholarship within Critical Security Studies. It critically questions the underlying assumptions of Joseph Nye's 'soft power' definition. The hypothesis possesses that key Hungarian officials cooperate with Russian individuals close to international intelligence operations of the Russian government - which is internationally perceived as an autocratic government.

The international dimensions to LGBTI-issues can possess a threat to a country's national security. That is not only my point of view but for instance, also the point of view of the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States of America. In 2019 they forced the Chinese stockholders to sell their stocks back to American stockholders in gay dating app Grindr. Their reading of the deal is that it gives the Chinese too much power over critical information of Americans, and therefore, it possesses a threat towards national security.

On the other end of the spectrum, Russia also sees the Western evolution on LGBTI-rights as a threat towards its national security. According to The Nation correspondent Sean Guillory, sexuality is seen in Russia as "a kind of new sexual sovereignty defending Orthodox Christian morality against the corrosive influence of Western decadence." (The Nation, 2013). Indeed, on the website of the Russian News Official Agency RIA, they speak about a new iron curtain around sexual values (RIA, 2013). As I will elaborate on later, the Russian National Security Strategy sees the defence of traditional family values as a critical challenge for Russia's national security.

So the question raises how this all relates to the classic 'soft power'-theory. The coming paragraphs compare Joseph Nye's 'soft power'-findings to more recent scholarship on populist and global right politics.

### **Soft Power and autocratic illiberal democracies**

The existence of soft power and all related theories has been food for thought for the past three decades. While many do agree about the existence of soft power, the importance and efficiency of it is still up to debate. To understand the basic concepts of this theory, a reading of 'Soft Power'-father Joseph Nye is necessary.

According to Nye: Soft Power is "getting others to want the outcomes that you want". They do it by using their "attractive power". He sees three resources for countries' their soft power: (1) culture, (2) political values, and (3) foreign policies (Nye, 2004: 5-11).

By reading his work, it becomes clear that Nye assumes that soft power strategies better work "within liberal democracies". Therefore, he often refers to the USA as an excellent example. "Narrow values and parochial cultures" seem to have less 'soft power'-ability (Nye, 2004: 6, 11, 13, 17).

Nye also assumes that "no country likes to feel manipulated, even by soft power" (Nye, 2004: 25). These assumptions may have been accurate during the (early post)-Cold War period, however in an age where populism is flourishing the words of Nye should be read with more caution.

Indeed - the link between 'soft power'-strategies and autocratic foreign policies is not an apparent relationship. While some aspects of 'soft power'-strategies can easily be found back in the international political contemporary reality, that does not exactly mean that these autocracies follow the 'soft power'-paths as described by Joseph Nye.

However, with increased strength on several levels of autocratic states, one must not underestimate the 'promotional factor' these autocracies have.

Already in 1997, Fareed Zakaria wrote about so-called 'illiberal democracies'. These are states that have "elections [that] are rarely as free and fair as in the West today, but they do reflect the reality of popular participation in politics and support for those elected.". These illiberal democratic leaders often go beyond constitutional limits without a lot of scrutiny (Zakaria, 1997: 22-23). These illiberal democracies also fit in this research focus on autocracies. Zakaria also speaks about liberal(ising) autocracies (Zakaria, 1997: 26, 27, 29, 40). The terms illiberal democracy and autocracy do not entirely mean the same, but one can assume that illiberal democracies form a category within autocracies. Both terms will, therefore, be used interchangeably throughout this paper.

The promotion of illiberal autocratic democracies has been food for thought over the years. As described above, the strict definition of Nye's 'soft power' does not allow autocracies to be embodied in that. Christopher Walker describes it as follows: "the application of the term soft power—a benign concept generally applied to efforts made to bolster a country's image, contribute to open debate, and win friends and allies—to the ideas-related efforts of the authoritarians is problematic. What the authoritarian regimes are practicing is instead a more malign mirror image of soft power." (Walker, 2016: 61).

While democratic states often base their 'soft power'-ability on a mix of international NGOs and free press, autocratic states that want to use 'soft power'-tactics use government-led media channels<sup>5</sup> and so-called GONGO's<sup>6</sup> to influence international institutions or politics outside their own countries (Walker, 2016).

In a Foreign Affairs article, Walker releases the term 'sharp power' for soft power being waged by autocracies (Walker, 2017). Autocracies were able to wage sharp power in countries that underwent a "democratic downturn". He describes sharp power as "This is an approach to international affairs that typically involves efforts at censorship, or the use of manipulation to sap the integrity of independent institutions. Sharp power has the effect of limiting free expression and distorting the political environment". The election interference of Russia in 2017 is an example of this (Walker, 2018: 10-12).

Still, 'sharp power' does not entirely embody autocratic soft power. The structure behind autocracies their 'soft power'-ability is intrinsically different from the structure of liberal democracies' their 'soft power'-ability. While soft power in liberal democracies is often something that exists organically, autocracies need to establish a well-thought 'soft power'-strategy via (financially) supporting international media channels and GONGOs. This paper adds another category to the 'soft power'-toolbox of autocracies: supporting already existing international networks in liberal democracies that support their values. The international pro-family movement is an excellent example of this.

Therefore soft power in this research is not solely defined as a weapon of liberal democracies. It does, however, depart from the basic idea of 'attracting the other' - something that Nye already posed in his first works on the issue. But besides that, autocratic soft power departs from two other assumptions: a well-thought financially supported strategy (1), the channels are government-owned media, GONGOs, and already existing international organisations (2). The means exist out of state-financed propaganda via these channels and interactions between befriended ideologists, oligarchs, academics and government officials via for instance conferences. These strategies make a differentiation in their target groups as well: ordinary citizens (1) and political elites (2). To reach ordinary citizens, the autocratic soft power might rather focus on their media channels and GONGOs that can support befriended movements in other countries. If the focus is on the political elite, preference will be given to outsourcing their soft power to already existing international organisations. Outsourcing soft power means that the autocracy jumps on an already existing international movement with both financial and ideological means, so the movement can further grow and increase its reach. This research researches explicitly a case wherein this idea fits.

While not disagreeing - this paper does not follow the purely 'sharp power'- definition as posed by Christopher Walker. As will be proven further, the outsourcing of Russia's soft power, in this case, does not happen as secretive as for instance, the Russian interference in the USA Presidential Elections. The way Russia creates an attraction via outsourcing soft power to international movements towards its policies on sexuality can be openly (be it indirectly) found on the websites of these organisations. Therefore I stay using the term 'autocratic soft power' instead of 'sharp power'. The nature of both concepts is not entirely the same.

### **Ontological security**

The practicalities of Russia's soft power strategy will be discussed in the next chapter. The following paragraphs will draw a theoretical framework that explains the causes of autocracies to make a soft power strategy. This theoretical framework is based on Anthony Giddens's ontological security theory and the scholarship that

fits these ideas within international relations.

Professor Filip Ejodus defines ontological security within international relations as follows: "Ontological Security Theory (OST) which is based on a premise that actors in world politics are often ready to compromise physical security and other important material gains in order to protect their sense of continuity in the world." (Ejodus, 2018: 883).

When certain realities let to notable changes in a country, countries can become ontologically insecure (Ejodus, 2018: 884). In the case of the Russian Federation, this could, for instance, be the fall of the Soviet Union, but also the demographic decline. This kind of realities that lead to ontological insecurity are called critical situations. These critical situations emerge when the existence of what is taken for granted is under threat (Ejodus, 2018: 887).

According to Steele and Homolar, three features are essential if it comes to the study of ontological insecurity within populist world politics. The first one is the special relationship between routines and anxiety. Certain routines being disrupted will lead to anxiety. This anxiety leads to a change in how the world is governed. Already in 1957, Neumann linked the "perceptions of alienation" to the spectrum wherein politicians take decisions (Neumann, 1957). When anxiety grows, states do no longer depend on rational experts, but "expertise itself". This turning back to routines opens up a window for populist politics (Steele & Homolar, 2019: 2).

The second feature is the relationship between narratives and memory. Populist politicians their narrative is often set on certain routines or realities from the past. This is not just the content and the way that they talk, but they also relate to their future policy proposals (Steele & Homolar, 2019: 3).

The last feature is the relationship between crisis and insecurity. The changes or disruptions that are related to late-modernity are often perceived as a crisis. These crises lead to an increased feeling of insecurity (Steele & Homolar, 2019: 3). Again, this paves the way for populist politicians to pave the way for propagating pre-modernity realities.

These critical situations can also lead to a collective outburst of anxiety, according to Professor Ejodus (Ejodus, 2018: 887). This fits in the idea of the international movement against LGBTI-rights. As will be elaborated on in the next section, this is a very diverse movement existing out of several religions, ethnicities, and nationalities. Also, the motives are sometimes different to unite in an international movement. A good example is again the existing threat of a declining demography as posed by the 'demographic winter theory'.

## **The International Traditional Family Value Movement and its impact**

Where the exact origins lay for the international movement behind the advocacy for traditional family values lays is not entirely clear.

Buss and Herman date it back to what they call the 'Christian Right' and the 1994 Cairo Conference on Population. The third UN Conference on Population received a lot of criticism by conservative groups linked to the Vatican to be too feminist. Indeed - feminist groups lobbied successfully during the leading-up to the conference to influence the outcomes on abortion in the final conference text. The Vatican revealed a bold statement against it. Moreover, right-wing Christian groups saw this event as a sign to better international coordinate themselves (Buss & Herman, 2003: 60-62).

Scholars also see the origins of the World Congress of Families (see later) in the Christian Right movement (Buss & Herman, 2003: 81-82). This paper will show that this interpretation is dated and that there is also an important autocratic 'soft power' geopolitical & multi-religious component to WCF.

What the two scholars rightfully point out is that at the time of writing, LGBTI-rights were not the focus of the Christian Right movement. Women's rights - like abortion and contraception - was their primary focus. It was only because domestic partners of the international Christian Right movement -in the West- started to advocate against LGBTI-rights that there was also an increased focus on it (Buss & Herman, 2003: 121,125). This assumption might have been correct in 2003, but is not in 2019. Back then, only two countries recognised marriages between same-sex couples, but in the meantime, LGBTI-rights became in many countries at the centre of the political debate. This led to a considerable shift in the focus of the international traditional family values movement.

While the demands of male homosexuals were basically ignored before the start of this decade by the Christian Right, this is less true for the rights of lesbians. During the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the Christian groups - like the United Families International (UFI) - took considerable efforts to fight the demands of the lesbian community. It was also unprecedented that they reached out to Muslim countries like Pakistan and Egypt to find support. In 2011 Professor Bob Clifford pointed out correctly that there is a "baptist-burqa" alliance and therefore speaks about the "Global Right" instead of the "Christian Right" (Clifford, 2011: 36-37).

According to Clifford, besides some The Vatican, primarily NGOs play a vital role in the "Global Right"-movement. The Howard Center For Family, Religion, and Society - founded in 1976 by later World Congress Of Families-founder Allan Carlson - is seen

as one of the founding NGOs in “Global Right”-advocacy work (Clifford, 2011: 42).

Whether to call it the ‘Christian Right’ or ‘Global Right’, the origins are the same. They date back to times where the right-wing organisations within the Vatican were organising themselves on an international level. Since then the network has moved beyond Christianity and now unites several religious groups - like Muslim and Russian Orthodox leaders - in their fight for traditional values.

Autocratic governments jumped on this international network of pro-family organisations aimed at influencing international decision-making. From the study of ontological security, one must see this as a part of the existential feature of a state. As proven above, the entrance ticket to the international pro-family movement is not only for one specific religion or state. Several groups, states, and religions join the campaigns against LGBTI-rights with several interests. As the next chapter will prove, Russia joined and supports these networks out of a geopolitical autocratic ‘soft power’- reasons.

*IN SEARCH OF AN IDENTITY*

# RUSSIA'S SOFT & SEXUAL POWER

There has been written a lot on the rise of pro-Russian political and social movements in Europe in recent years. The events that happened in 2013 and 2014 in Ukraine showed that Putin's administration takes a serious interest in keeping or increasing Russia's grip on its direct neighbourhood. This so-called 'Putinism' was developed by the Russian government as "a toolkit of political, economic, informational, and military mechanisms aimed at progressing its foreign policy interests" (Polyakova, 2015).

As briefly mentioned in the introduction, from a 'soft power'-view traditional views on sexuality play a significant role in Russia's foreign policy towards Europe. The following pages will prove that certain political elites in Russia sees the on-going debate on LGBTI-rights - especially in Central Eastern Europe - as one of the only debates where Russia can still be morally superior towards the West. Russia's foreign policy is partly based on a linkage between its internal and external opposition.

### **Russia's power consolidates on external threats**

When the USSR fell, and Russia's governmental structure was weakened on all levels, the demand to rebuild a strong nation-state was strong. This can be historically explained since there has always been a perception that a robust Russian empire led to a form of security towards its citizens. This conviction dates back to Napoleon and Mongol times. Between 1996 and 2012, opinion polls suggest that one of the primary expectations of the Russian society from their president was to "restore or maintain Russia's superpower status" (Grigas, 2016:17).

Since Putin serves as president of the Russian Federation, the government's (foreign) policies have been set up to restore the superpower status it once had during the USSR. Putin's actions to restore Russia's superpower status can be distinguished in the groups their policy strategy targets: Russian compatriots & non-Russians (Grigas, 2016: 2).

Since the wars in Ukraine and Georgia, the strategy towards Russian compatriots became quite clear. According to Agnia Grigas (2016), "Moscow has pursued an increasingly consistent seven- stage reimperialisation policy trajectory toward its compatriots": (1) Soft power, (2) humanitarian policies, (3) compatriot policies, (4) passportisation, (5) information warfare, (6) protection and (7) informal control or formal annexation of the compatriots' territories" (Grigas, 2016: 26).

If it comes to non-Russian actors in international politics, Russia has used its weakness and corrupt institutions to (re)gain its power. Via energy deals, they, for instance, increased the dependence on Russian natural resources considerably. This has not only happened in post-Soviet spheres, but also in European Union' member states (Grigas, 2016: 20).

All this comes together in a government who wisely combines soft power with hard power strategies. They do not see both forms of power as something completely different but instead use soft power to increase the effectiveness of their hard power actions. Business and cultural interests are being linked to security issues (Grigas, 2016: 29).

Professor Bill Bowring theorises another reading of the increased hostility towards the West and its liberal institutions by Russia. According to him, there is a renewed urge towards more sovereignty by the Russians. By joining international institutions like the Council of Europe and the ratification of the European Convention on Human Rights, policy-makers often felt powerless (Bowring, 2013: 193-205).

Bowring cites the Chairman of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation Valeriy Zorking (Rossiykaya Gazeta, 2010) on the power and rulings of the European Court of Human Rights: *"When such a decision is taken in the interests of the protection of the rights and freedoms of the citizen and the development of our country, Russia will always precisely obey it. But when it or another decision of the Strasbourg court is doubtful from the point of view of the goal of the European Convention on Human Rights and moreover in a directions fashion concerns national sovereignty, and fundamental constitutional principles, Russia has the right to work out a defence mechanism against such a decisions. [...] Like any other European state, Russia must fight as much for the preservation of its sovereignty, as for the careful relationship with the European Convention, and defence of its sovereignty against inadequate, doubtful decisions."* (Bowring, 2013: 194-195)

As Russia decided that it will never become a member of the EU and NATO, they also decided not to challenge the organisations anymore but undermine them (Hanley, 2017:152) from inside. They do that by, for instance, trying to 'decouple' Central and Eastern European countries from the EU (Fedorov, 2013: 320). This happens through the support of far-right parties and the establishment of a framework for policy-makers to consolidate conservative and illiberal values in the EU (Klapsis, 2015: 35-36; Hanley, 2017: 152).

Russia's foreign policy should be theorised as an egocentric power tool for the current political elite in Russia. It departs from fundamental realist theories within international relations. It is in the own interest of the Russian state to look morally superior to the West via, for instance, taking and supporting conservative family policy measures. The foreign policy of the Russian Federation tries to serve the Kremlin's national interest as efficient as possible by focussing both on soft power and hard power and independently from each other on Russians living abroad and non-Russians. Besides that, it shows a revival in the lost national proudness. This is being reproduced in their 'sovereign fights' against institutions like the NATO, the EU, and the Council of Europe.

### **Domestic focus on sexuality**

As discussed in chapter 3, ontological security explains the negative focus of the Russian Federation on the development of rights for sexual and gender minorities. However, next to an existential explanation, also a more practical and political

strategical explanation can be given.

The negative focus of the Russian government on sexual minorities became apparent after the presidential election in 2011. Academics link the questions on the legitimacy of Vladimir Putin in 2011 with the rise of hatred towards the West and the increasing emphasis on traditional Russian values (Mole, 2016: 144).

Already during the anti-Kremlin protests after the presidential elections, homophobic discourse became more frequent. Both the pro- and anti-Kremlin demonstrators used homophobia to scrutinise each other. This rose all the way up to the highest level of government. At some point, Vladimir Putin even compared the protesters their symbol - a white ribbon - with condoms. He said that he thought they were 'AIDS-activists' (which was at that time very much linked to the LGBTI- community) (Sperling, 2015:116).

As mentioned above, also the opposition suggested that Vladimir Putin and his entourage are homosexuals. Slogans that are translated to "One, two, three: Putin get out! Three, two, one: Putin is a fag!" were very common during opposition protests (Sperling, 2015: 119).

Valerie Sperling correctly refers to the Russian sociologist Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova to explain these positions: "the Russian political realm is practically female free ... and emphasise the under spread understanding that Russia's leadership is male and heterosexual. Manifestations of politicised sexism and homophobia thus serve to reinforce each other and ongoing male domination in the political realm" (Sperling, 2015: 206-207).

But how and why does the Russian government target LGBTI-people so specifically? I argue that the creation of an internal enemy was a trick from the past. The USSR its power-consolidation was based on the threat towards its internal and external enemies. Since the USSR's internal enemy - religion - took power after the fall of communism, the Kremlin needed to find another enemy. In their exploration to a new internal enemy, already in the nineties, the focus was on non- traditionalism. However, the specific focus on LGBTI-issues came in 2011. When Vladimir Putin was facing growing protests against his re-election, he was looking for a way to re-unite the Russians. He wanted to pinpoint a common enemy and threat to the 'Russian Motherland'.

While the political discourse in Russia was becoming more and more homophobic, the real start of Russia's state-sponsored homophobia was 2013. In 2013 the Russian Duma introduced an anti- propaganda law for LGBTI-issues. The law prohibits positively promoting LGBTI-issues in places where minors might be present.

Since then, the visibility of the LGBTI-movement and community deteriorated. One might also suggest that the crime rate towards LGBTI-people increased dramatically. The far-right group Occupy Pedophilia - with origins in Ukraine - started to lure young gays via dating apps to deserted places to beat them up or even murder them. A 2016 report by the Equal Rights Trust suggests that the police received 200 cases on homophobic attacks in that year. None of them led to prosecution (Equal Rights Trust, 2016).

Interestingly, the fight for traditional family values and the interaction of state homophobia is primarily essential to the Russian Federation's foreign policy towards Europe (Klipsas, 2015: 36). Russia tries to get Central and Eastern European countries to block the development of LGBTI- rights because it sees it as a way of stagnating the liberal developments within the European Union (Hanley, 2017: 153).

Especially since the crisis in Ukraine and Crimea, Russia started to link their internal enemy to their external enemy: The West. While the EuroMaidan revolution was still going on, billboards linking the joining of the EU with same-sex marriage were showing up all around the post-Soviet republic. Later investigations suggest that these were paid by Russian oligarchs close to the Kremlin (Ayoub, 2016). However, the following pages will prove that Russia is already much longer involved in the international homophobic and transphobic movement - let it be less active and publicly.

### **Russia's Soft Power**

In Today's increasingly populist world, the illiberal ideas as embodied by Putin's administration are gaining more and more popularity (Van Herpen, 2016: 23). Viktor Orban, but also Matteo Salvini from Italy, Thierry Baudet from The Netherlands, or Nigel Farage from the UK have referred to so-called 'Putinism' as a good way of governing.

Just like other autocracies, Russia's 'soft power'-strategy is based on selling their interpretation on current issues in international politics to an international audience. From a media perspective, Russia Today is responsible for this. However, while Russia organised a crackdown on its domestic NGOs, it also set up a network of GONGOs that have to influence international decision-making (Walker, 2016).

Inside Putin's ideological advisors, Aleksandr Dugin is considered essential. While 'Eurasian' theories exist out of a wide range of autocratic, fascist, and mystic ideas, they had a not-to-be- underestimated impact on Russia's contemporary politics (Van Herpen, 2016: 9).

The increase of conservative policies in Russia can be easily explained by the

increase of power of the Russian Orthodox Church in contemporary politics. It is even part of the Kremlin's interest to make from the Russian Orthodox Church, an international church (Van Herpen, 2016: 12).

#### International defender of traditional family values

One of the only times, Russia is referring in a positive way to human rights on an international level, is when it is to defend their Russians living abroad (Grigas, 2016: 34). In most other cases, it uses the several international forums to question the universality of human rights<sup>9</sup> (Van Herpen, 2015: 143-144).

In 2009 Russia launched an initiative within the UN Human Rights Council for "Promoting Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms through a Better Understanding of Traditional Values". In the official explanations they most of the times referred to female genital mutilation, but after some time it became clear that this also included Russia's fight against LGBT-rights. After the acceptance of the initiative, a workshop was organised around it by the UN in 2010. Many representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church took part in the workshop (Van Herpen, 2015: 144-145).

Besides the UN and USA, also regional international organisations - like the OSCE and Council of Europe - openly criticised Russia's 'traditional values'-interpretation of the human rights conventions. The European Court of Human Rights has condemned Russia several times for its domestic attacks on the LGBTI-community, but they seem to ignore the rulings (Van Herpen, 2015: 146-148).

As Van Herpen notes, Russia's attempts to change the interpretation of the universality of human rights have been quite effective (Van Herpen, 2015: 146-148).

While direct influence is impossible to examine, it is also impossible to ignore the negative discourse on human rights by an increasing number of government officials in the Western hemisphere in the last few years.

It is evident that the fight against the international demands of the LGBTI-movement is an integral part of Russia's soft power strategy. It links the Russia's domestic goals with an on-going debate in many countries around the world. They see sexuality and the on-going debate in many non-Russian speaking countries as one of the only fields where they can still show off as morally superior. Especially in countries who were formerly in the sphere of influence of the USSR, they perceive their chances to have an impact on local policies still plausible. As I will prove more in detail later, this is why Russia puts so much effort in supporting anti-LGBTI organisations around the world. As part of the argumentation for that, the next chapter will focus on the 'soft power'-relationship between Moscow and Budapest since the fall of the Iron Curtain.

## *THE CHRISTIAN-SOVIET PARADOX*

# HUNGARY-RUSSIA RELATIONS

As in most Central European former Eastern Bloc countries, Russian politics are not popular in the Hungarian society. This can - of course - be explained by the very close relationship between Budapest and Moscow during the Socialist rule.

Opinion polls on LGBTI-issues also do not suggest that Russia is effectively influencing the Hungarian population. 67% of the Hungarians answered positively on the question if LGB-people should have the same rights as heterosexuals (ILGA- Europe, 2017). That can be explained by the fact that already since the end of the Second World War, sexuality has been a part of the political discussion in Hungary<sup>10</sup>. Both conservative and progressive political elites towards the LGBTI-community have alternated each other since the fall of the Iron Curtain.

The general political discourse changed drastically since the second election of the Christian Democrats Fidesz as the leading political party in Hungary. Prime minister Viktor Orban is a massive supporter of what is increasingly called an 'illiberal democracy' (Orban, 2014). Nationalism, strict migration policy, and Christianity are the core characteristics of his political ideology. Globalisation, multiculturalism, and liberalism seem to be the opposite to his world views.

Before Fidesz took over, Hungary's government - led by social-democrats - implemented a lot of liberal legislation. For instance, in 2007, they introduced registered partnerships for same-sex couples. One may argue that this was mainly because of EU-influence, but the opposite is true. Already since the nineties, the LGBTI-movement has known a rapid evolution. With many organisations focussed on the gay community (Buzogány, 2012). A queer identity has found its entrance in Hungary's political and civil society for more than two decades<sup>12</sup>. While Russia has little impact on the Hungarian public opinion, it does have an impact on Hungarian politics. Especially Jobbik - but also Fidesz - proved to have a good relationship with high-ranking Russian government officials and ideologists close to the Kremlin. A 2016 report by Political Capital puts it as follows: "Jobbik and Fidesz have cultivated political/ideological networks that have the possibility to serve the Kremlin's interest." (Political Capital, 2016, 30). The cooperation between Budapest and Moscow is both on an economical and 'soft power'-level.

In the first two decades after communism, the Hungarian governments' political direction was Europe. This led obviously to an increase in the rights of LGBTI-citizens in the country. Russia was not the preferred partner during these decades. This also includes the period between 1998 and 2002 - when Fidesz was in power.

The turning point was an informal meeting between Viktor Orban and Vladimir Putin in 2009. The meeting was set up by the former Hungarian ambassador to Russia Keskeny (Political Capital, 2016, 35)

This chapter will examine the general 'soft power'-relationship between the Russian Federation and Hungary. There are three ways of waging soft power in Hungary for Russia - according to Political Capital: via the media, via institutions and via persons.

### **Fidesz & Jobbik: Serving The Kremlin's Interest?**

While Fidesz its relationship with the Kremlin is more ambiguous than the one of Jobbik, Russia's interest can be much more served by Fidesz. Fidesz has been in power since 2009 and was able to change Hungary a lot in those ten years.

While the former MSZP-led government introduced registered partnerships for same-sex couples in 2008, Fidesz limited marriage constitutionally to opposite-sex

couples in 2011. The political discourse has become more and more homophobic over the years as well - by for instance trying to limit the gay pride parade (Political Capital, 2016: 35).

Jobbik's cooperation with Russia is more explicit. MEP Bela Kovacs has been publicly accused of spying for Russia (Reuters, 2017). Also, German investigators found out that the Kremlin donated - via Belarussian oligarch Alyaksandr Usovsky - money to the far-right party (HVG, 2017).

According to Political Capital, "there is a systematic illiberal values agenda represented by Fidesz and its coalition partners" (Political Capital, 2016: 35). On the other hand, they state - in reference to the current Polish government' policies - that these policies are not an "import" of Russia, but rather an "expression of right-wing Christian (mainly Catholic) traditionalism" (Political Capital, 2016: 36).

While it is of course hard to prove whether or not the policies implemented by Fidesz in recent years are because of the influence of Russia, it is hard to deny the fact the similarities between them.

In a blog post, Péter Krekó stated that the Hungarian government is cracking down civil society "à la Russe". Therefore he refers to the way the Hungarian government has dealt with the Central European University in recent years, but he also refers to a new NGO-law in Hungary. This new law weakens the position and strength of NGOs, according to Krekó. He sees in these new policies many similarities with what the Russian government has been doing before (Krekó, 2017).

### **NGOs: Non-Hungarian Organisations?**

There are two main NGOs serving Russian interest regarding traditional family values in Hungary. The first one is the Association of Christian Intellectuals. The NGO - who was founded by the Christian political party KDNP (coalition partner of Fidesz) - was the first to "ratify" a petition in support for the Russian anti-propaganda bill. The other NGO who signed the petition was Together For Life. Both organisations are led by Edit Frivaldszky (Political Capital, 2016: 37).

Another activity of Frivaldszky is the Oikosz Foundation. Oikosz is founded by Ervin Nagy - former chairman of Jobbik. Nowadays, it serves as a compilation of "fake NGOs established by Fidesz for political marketing purposes" (Political Capital, 2016: 37).

Frivaldszky seems to be a notable figure in the conservative international relations

of Hungary. Besides her domestic activities, she is also behind the homophobic French movement Mannif Pour Tous and the conservative counterpart of Avaaz - CitizenGO (Political Capital, 2016: 37). She has taken part in the World Congress of Families' annual gathering as well (see later).

The relationship between Budapest and Moscow has been very dubious since the fall of communism. Economically, the Kremlin has via befriended oligarchs still a certain, but declining leverage in Hungary. Nevertheless, there is little evidence that the Hungarian government is taking action to free themselves from any involvement in domestic policy-making from Russia. Rather the contrary, certain acts and discourses show an increased interest in befriending the Kremlin. Throughout the year, several Hungarian politicians (both government and opposition) have built relationships with Russian officials. While the effective waging of power by Russia on Hungary in regard to LGBTI-rights remains unidentified, the links and admiration towards Russia's policies about it are more and more clear. This admiration by Hungarian politicians of Russian policy-making is a direct result of a country's soft power according to Nye's definition. The next chapter will dig deeper into the details of the soft power relationships that are built via the international homophobic networks and how they relate to Hungary and Russia.

*THE INTERTWINING BETWEEN RUSSIA AND HUNGARY VIA  
THESE NETWORKS*

## INTERNATIONAL ANTI-LGBT NETWORK

Autocratic soft power being waged through already existing international non-governmental organisations is something that did not get enough attention. While the previous chapters mainly focused on the reason why Russia is so committed to the spread of traditional family values around the world, this chapter will show that the network of homophobic and conservative organisations is a world-wide phenomenon. One of the goals of the network is to serve the geopolitical interest of autocratic states their soft power strategy. Via outsourcing, these states depend on the transnational anti-LGBTI movement to sell their moral superiority towards the liberal West.

The following pages will map the most influential organisations in this network and what their relationship to the Hungarian government is and whether or not they have (in)direct links with well-known Russian government officials and oligarchs. This chapter will also analyse to what extent this relationship fits into the 'soft power'-strategy of the Russian Federation.

While anti-LGBTI stances are not the primary goal of the mission statement of the organisation, “the group had an outsized influence on anti-LGBT sentiment and legislation in many places” - according to an HRC-report on WCF (2015: 5). Also during the last conference of WCF in Verona, the increased focus on LGBTI-rights became clear.

While the workforce of WCF is 100% American, WCF has a lot of international links. Throughout the years, the international attention for WCF has risen since their scope is also much more international. In the beginning, their target group was mostly academics who were working on the ‘demographic winter theory’<sup>16</sup>. Later on, their target group shifted to policy-makers. The following sections will dig deeper into the special relationship WCF has with the Russian Federation.

The annual budget of WCF is estimated to be 500.000 USD - coming from conservative donors all over the world. While this seems to be rather modest, the combined budget of all partner organisations (as listed on a 2014 brochure) is the opposite. The annual budget of WCF and its affiliated organisations is estimated to be 216 million USD (HRC, 2015: 9).

## **WCF in Russia**

When I tried to enter the secured perimeter around the WCF conference venue in Verona on the second day, I was denied access for the third time. This time a police officer did not want to let me in. When I tried to explain to him that I was here to “monitor the conference and the protests against it”, he answered me in fluent Russian. Why he assumed I was Russian-speaking, is still unclear.

What is clear already for a few years is the connection the World Congress of Families has with oligarchs very close to the highest governmental ranks of the Russian Federation.

In an interview with Interfax-Religion, Larry Jacobs (WCF Managing Director) called Vladimir Putin “the one defending laws and morality consistent with the freedom in the US constitution” (Interfax-religion, 2012). The organisation seems to have had most of its influence on Russia (HRC, 2012).

The link between WCF and Russia can be traced back to the very origins of the organisation. In 1995 Allan Carlson - from the Howard Centre For Family, Religion & Society - was invited to Moscow by Prof. Dr. Anatoly Antonov and Prof. Dr. Viktor Medkov of the Lomonosov Moscow State University. They invited him for his theories on “the demolition of population sizes”. After this meeting, Carlson founded the World Congress of Families (HRC, 2012).

Notwithstanding the early links, the first WCF event in Russia only took place in 2011. After two years of organising the 'Demographic Summit', the WCF decided that it was time to organise its big annual gathering in Moscow in 2014 - which they had to cancel after the Ukraine-crisis.

### **WCF as a tool for Russia's Autocratic 'Soft Power' Strategy**

WCF and the Russian political elite are very close. However, there is still little proof of international links. This changed drastically when Shaltai Boltai - a secretive hackers group - leaked dozens of e-mails between conservative Russian activists. Also, Alexander Dugin and Konstantin Malofeev were involved in the leak (Buzzfeed, 2014). Described as "Putin's personal liaison with Europe's far-right" (The Budapest Beacon, 2014), Malofeev is a Russian oligarch with a lot of financial ties to Europe.

Buzzfeed journalists J. Lester Feder and Susie Armitage describe the content of the leak as follows: "Russian nationalists and social conservatives appear to be working together to use links with "pro- family" organizations in the U.S. and around the world to promote Russia's geopolitical agenda, according to emails sent between right-wing activists." (2014).

The e-mails proved the link between WCF and Malofeev, but also Vladimir Yakunin. As personal trustee of Putin and former head of the Russian Railway Company (one of the biggest employers in Russia), he has been leading a Berlin-based think-tank. Recently Yakunin's invitation to a conference in Brussels supported by EU-funding led to protest (Buzzfeed, 2019). He has been banned entry to the USA and Australia - after Russia's annexation of Crimea.

The e-mails also contained a participant list of the conference with the full names of the attendees on. On the list are MEPs and European ministers. (Buzzfeed, 2014) Most of the attendees their travel got paid by the Foundation of St. Andrew the First Called - which is chaired by Yakunin's wife.

While the methods on how these e-mails were obtained remain unclear, those involved in it did not deny their existence (Buzzfeed, 2014). They should academically not be treated as more than an indicator of WCF Russia's International Perspective, nor does it prove any effective influence on European governments.

As most of the data presented above suggest, Russia uses WCF as an actor in its geopolitical soft power strategy. Whether or not Russia is indirectly waging soft power on other European states through the World Congress of Families will be found out in the coming chapters.

## **WCF in Hungary**

Hungary has always been very active within the World Congress of Families. Deputy State Secretary Gergely Pröhle (cink.hu, 2014) and Katalin Novak took part in a traditional family value conferences in Moscow in September 2014.

However, even before, Hungarian government officials were already speaking at events organised by WCF. Miklós Soltész (former Hungarian Minister for Social, Family and Youth Affairs) participated in the Moscow Demographic Summit from June 29 till June 30 in Moscow. Afterward, he participated in several other events affiliated with WCF.

In 2017, WCF even organised in the Hungarian capital Budapest its annual summit. Because of that, WCF Managing Director praised the Hungarian government in a press release: "Hungary has demonstrated its strategic leadership as an advocate for the natural family in Europe." (christiannewswire.com, 2017).

## **WCF-links between Hungary and Russia**

Both the EU's progressiveness and Russia's conservativeness is refuelling the already marginalised status of the LGBTI-movement in Eastern Europe - according to the Southern Poverty Law Center (2017).

As the Russian Federation has many ties with WCF's management, it is almost impossible to not find any links between participants of the conference and Russian figures. Most of the outspoken Russian homophobes were present during the WCF Summit in Budapest.

For Hungary's State Secretary Katalin Novak, I found out that she was invited for the first time to a WCF-related conference in September 2014. The conference was taking place in Moscow and - according to the leaked participant list- she was invited by Igor Beloborodov. Beloborodov works for RISI - a governmental organisation with ties to Konstantin Malofeev. The same institution is accused of influencing the USA presidential election of 2016. The Foundation of St. Andrew the First-Called covered her travel costs - according to the participant list. This organisation is chaired by Natalya Yakunina - the wife of Vladimir Yakunin.

Beloborodov received a letter of gratitude of Novak in December 2015 for his participation in a conference called the Budapest Demographic Summit. The letter says that her ministry is working on a publication where they will include parts of the presentation of Beloborodov.

Where Beloborodov and Novak know each other from remains unclear. However,

here is video footage of the Russian researcher speaking at a conference in the Hungarian Parliament from September 2012. The conference was called 'International Conference On The Protection Of The Embryo And Human Life' and was organised by the Hungarian Women's Alliance. At this conference also Edit Frivaldszky (see earlier) gave a presentation. There was no evidence found that Novak was present at this conference.

When Novak became minister for Social, Family, and Youth Affairs, Miklós Soltész seemed to have disappeared from the WCF-stage. During the Demographic Summit in Moscow, besides himself also Natalya Yakunina was present. As the wife of the very influential Vladimir Yakunin, this suggests close links between the Kremlin and the WCF-participants.

Soltész also met with Beloborodov. They were both keynote speakers at the Third Annual International Riga Family Forum in 2011 - where WCF was a co-sponsor (ChristianNewsWire, 2011). Soltész also gave the opening keynote at the 2012 Hungarian Women's Alliance conference in the Hungarian parliament where Beloborodov was present.

One may suggest that Beloborodov currently is the main link between Hungarian and Russian WCF-supporters.

In the last two and a half decades, the World Congress of Families has grown from a rather conservative intellectual gathering to an influential geopolitical organisation. The organisation shaped a network of contacts between influential Russian oligarchs, conservative thinkers - supported by the American Alt-Right - that attract policy-makers from smaller countries involved in the WCF concerning traditional family values. Russia has been actively taken part in the activities of WCF. In particular Hungarian government officials seem to be prone to have several frequent contacts with Russian government officials and oligarchs.

The following two organisations will show that the anti-LGBT lobby is bigger than the World Congress of Families and that the Russians are not openly involved in every organisation the Hungarian government is involved in.

While the World Congress of Families seems to be uniting conservative government officials from all around the world - it is also worth taking the time to dig deeper into the NGO CitizenGO.

Registered as an NGO in Spain, they operate as the conservative equivalent of websites like Avaaz and All Out. Everybody can register themselves on the website, sign petitions, or create a petition within the values of CitizenGO. They claim on their website to have over 10 million 'active citizens'.

CitizenGO and the World Congress of Families are obvious partners of each other. The organisation is mentioned as a 'co-convener' on the website of the 2019 gathering of WCF in Verona (WCF Verona, 2019). Brian Brown, president of WCF, is a board member of the NGO (OpenDemocracy, 2019).

Undercover research of OpenDemocracy revealed in 2019 that the NGO sets up financial construction to get around election rules in Spain and therefore supports the far-right party Vox (OpenDemocracy, 2019). The financial sources, therefore, are coming from individuals close to the administration of USA president Donald Trump. The organisation also seems to have close 'business links' to Russian oligarch Konstantin Malofeev and Russian archpriest Alexey Komov (OpenDemocracy, 2019).

While not going further into detail, according to Open Democracy also has a good relationship with Fidesz (OpenDemocracy, 2019). It is indeed not immediately obvious what exact direct links between the Hungarian government and CitizenGO exist. However, as mentioned above, the Hungarian Edit Frivaldszky seems to be the leader of the liaison for the organisation.

Nevertheless, it is evident that Frivaldszky and Hungarian State Secretary Katalin Novak know each other. They participated together in several panels during several conferences. For instance, in October 2015 they both gave a presentation in Croatia for the organisation 'Uime obitelji' on the Hungarian family policy measures (Facebook 'Uime obitelji', 2015). They also both spoke at the 'One Of Us' conference in Budapest in September 2017 (One Of Us, 2017).

While her connections with Alexey Komov and Brian Brown have been mentioned before, she also seems to have connections with Igor Beloborodov. They both spoke on the conference organised in the Hungarian Parliament by the Hungarian Women's Alliance in 2012.

Another organisation set up to cooperate on and promote conservative family and gender values is the Political Network For Values. They describe themselves as:

*"The Political Network for Values is a global platform and a resource for legislators and political representatives rooted in a Trans-Atlantic dialogue on shared values and aimed at collaborating as a network on a local and global level by actively defending and promoting a decalogue of shared values among which is the protection of human life, marriage, family or religious freedom and conscience."*

- Political Network For Values on their website.

Already since their first conference in 2014, Hungary sent delegates. In 2014 the Hungarian Minister of Human Resources Zoltan Balogh was one of the keynote speakers. Afterwards, Katalin Novak represented Hungary several times. During the 2019 conference in Colombia, both Novak and Balogh were keynote speakers ([politicalnetworkforvalues.org](http://politicalnetworkforvalues.org)).

Important to note is also that Katalin Novak is listed on their website as vice-chair of the organisation ([politicalnetworkforvalues.org](http://politicalnetworkforvalues.org)).

Besides their connections with the Hungarian government, the organisation seems to have connections with politicians across the European Union. During the 2019 conference in Colombia, the Polish Deputy Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy Kazimierz Kuberski was one of the keynote speakers. In 2017 they also organised a conference inside the European Parliament. The website of the Political Network For Values states that besides WCF and CitizenGO, also the European Peoples Party (EPP) was a co-sponsor of the event ([politicalnetworkforvalues.org](http://politicalnetworkforvalues.org)). The EPP also advertised it on their website ([eppgroup.eu](http://eppgroup.eu), 2017). According to the euobserver, several MEPs sent a letter to the president of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani to explain his involvement in the conference. The news medium also classified the event as an "anti-gay summit" ([euobserver.eu](http://euobserver.eu), 2017).

Within this organisation there is no direct connection to the Russian government, but many of the leading figures are also highly involved in conservative organisations like CitizenGO and the World Congress of Families. Two of the members of the board of directors are Brian Brown (President of WCF) and Ignacio Arsuaga (President of CitizenGO). The board also only exists out of native Spanish and English speakers ([politicalnetworkforvalues.org](http://politicalnetworkforvalues.org)).

The previous paragraph suggests that the organisation is mainly set up by conservative organisations to advocate within the Americas. In recent years Hungary has shown political interest in the region. The Orban administration announced plans to financially support churches in Mexico, for instance (24.hu, 2018). These policies back the central ideology behind the Political Network For

Values.

It is noteworthy that the language towards the LGBTI-movement from this organisation seems to be less violent. No direct comments towards the community are found on their website. Nevertheless, the conference schedules show that during several occasions the "Institution Of Marriage" has been discussed (politicalnetworkforvalues.org).

What the real purpose for the existence of this organisation is, is not entirely clear - and this research, unfortunately, does not allow further investigation into it. Nevertheless, since the people that are involved in this organisation are known for their homo- and transphobic comments, it is unlikely that any critical debate in LGBTI-issues will happen within this organisation. However, WCF and CitizenGO already gather most of the conservative family thinkers around the world, so, notably, that the government officials leading this organisation found it necessary to set up just another one. It seems that this organisation mainly gathers European and (Latin-)American officials and that Christianity - as one of the main religions in their country - is the common ground.

This chapter shows how an autocratic government - like the Russian Federation - organises itself within organisations that fit their ideals to support their 'soft power'-strategy. By supporting these organisations, Russia outsources the execution of its soft power. The World Congress of Families, CitizenGO and the Political Network For Values are part of the interlinked framework of the Global Right specifically focussing on traditional family values. Hungarian government officials and NGO representatives are coveted members of these organisations and even take prominent leadership roles within some of them. Russia, from its side, has ties to WCF and CitizenGO already from its existence. It seems that Russia has 'encapsulated' these organisations into its framework to destabilise the EU - as noted by several scholars (Hanley, 2017; Federov, 2013; Klapsis, 2015). Government officials, religious thinkers, and oligarchs close to the Kremlin seem to be operating as liaisons within these organisations for these organisations and government officials within these organisations. Hungary has proven to have good connections with these Russian liaisons in the last few years. The main focus of Russia's geopolitical strategy is undermining the EU and USA hegemony (Matthews, 2015; Hanley, 2017). It is important here to note that the Russian influence is an indirect influence. Soft power is, in essence, indirect influence on a country. Through Hungary's participation in these networks - which are considerably supported by Russia - the Hungarian political elite receives ideas, for instance, a new family policy plan19. This policy-outcomes can be categorised as potential 'soft power'-outcomes.

*THE INTERNATIONAL ENEMIES OF THE LGBTI-MOVEMENT*

## CONCLUSION

Fifty years after the Stonewall Uprising in New York City - the start of the modern LGBTI- movement - the transnational anti-LGBTI lobby seems to be better organised than ever before.

The question about Russia's state-sponsored homophobia is not up to debate anymore. The Kremlin established a society-wide threat towards the LGBTI-community, and since then it is to be perceived as one of the main reasons for the downfall of Russia's demography. Key Russian officials link the causality of HIV to the LGBTI-community, and the decline of the Russian populations is partly explained by 'a Western LGBTI-plot'. They embedded the fight against LGBTI-rights in the USA-invented 'demographic winter theory'. This existential perception can be embodied within the ontological security theory. A wide range of policies - which also include foreign policies - need to stop the evolvement of the LGBTI-community in Russia and abroad.

Therefore Russia has jumped on the international movement against LGBTI-rights. They use organisations - like the World Congress of Families - to outsource their autocratic soft power strategy.

As written by the Budapest-based think-tank Political Capital: there are "*political/ideological networks that have the possibility to serve the Kremlin's interest*" in Hungarian politics. If it comes to LGBTI-rights, the World Congress of Families is the main international actor in the worldwide spread of homophobia - with its narrow ties to governments all over the world. The Russian strategic involvement in the organisations seems to be out of the question. However, next to Russia - the Orban-led Hungarian government seems to be second in rank if it comes to close ties with WCF.

From the Hungarian side, Katalin Novak seems to be Hungary's WCF liaison. WCF Russia - headed by Alexey Komov - their organisation is much bigger and more complex. For the Hungary- Russia relations within the organisation, Igor Beloborodov seems to be the liaison.

While the practical impact of Russia on Hungary regarding family policies remains unclear, Russia has set up a network where it might be able to do so. Moreover, Hungary does actively participates in this network. Links do not mean influence, but they do mean cooperation.

The lack of awareness and perception of a threat of international cooperation concerning LGBTI- issues of the Hungarian government form an imminent threat towards LGBTI-equality in Hungary. The structural contacts between key Hungarian politicians with Russian officials also form a threat towards the national security and sovereignty of the Hungarian state and The European Union.

Hungary seems to take a very active role in preventing the European Union from further developments of LGBTI-equality, especially, since 2015. By blocking a lot of the EU proposals on LGBTI-equality Hungary is taking a serious position in influencing EU institutions concerning LGBTI-rights.

The new governments in Poland and Hungary are able to block to stop the EU's policy direction of promoting LGBTI-rights all around the world - according to Stefano Gennarini (Vice President for Legal Studies at the Center for Family and Human Rights). He, therefore, refers to the veto of both countries at the proposal of Luxembourg at the Council of (Justice) Ministers of the European Union in 2015 to Union-wide recognise same-sex couples that entered into marriage outside their own country. He thereby formulates an aspiration that the EU will also stop pressuring UN Bodies on the introduction of LGBTI-rights (Gennarini, 2015).

Indeed, since the Third Orbán government, Hungary is taking a more vocal position against LGBTI- rights, especially, on an EU level. In 2016, Hungary also blocked a proposal by the Dutch government to make a statement on improving LGBTI-equality in the European Union. According to PinkNews, the Hungarian government said that "Hungary is not in the position to agree with the list of actions to advance LGBTI equality." (PinkNews, 2016). In that same year, they also prevented to European Commission from sponsoring a boat to participate in Amsterdam's Canal Pride Parade (Parlementaire Monitor ANP, 2016).

Malta proposed a joint informal document in the European Council to take action against discrimination of LGBTI-people in the European Union. This led - again - to a non-signing of the document by Hungary and Poland (maltatoday, 2018). Earlier that year Hungary and Poland also already blocked an Austrian proposal to sign a joint statement by the EU employment and social affairs ministers 'to promote gender equity' in digital spheres. They did not want to accept the reference to LGBTI in the text (Politico, 2018).

The ideology of Russia's conservatives and WCF is infiltrating in the EU's decision-making bodies through Hungary.

As the prominent Hungarian LGBTI-activist Tamas Dombas once told me: "*The LGBT-movement is transnationally organised. So why would the countermovement to us not be transnationally organised?*"

## References

Armitage, S., & Lester Feder, J. (2014, December 8). Emails Show "Pro-Family" Activists Feeding Contacts To Russian Nationalists. Buzzfeed News.

Associated Press. (2007, May 10). American Conservatives Organize Social-Issues Conference in Poland. Fox News. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20140903233917/http://www.foxnews.com/story/2007/05/10/american-conservatives-organize-social-issues-conference-in-poland/>

Ayoub, P. M. (2014). With Arms Shut: Threat Perception, Norm Reception, and Mobilized Resistance to LGBT Rights. *Journal of Human Rights*, 13(3), 337–362. <http://doi.org/10.1080/14754835.2014.919213>

Ayoub, P. M. (2016). When States Come Out: Europe's Sexual Minorities And The Politics Of Visibility.

Bencs, M. (2017, May 22). Budapest a családok fóvarosa – Családok Budapesti Világtalálkozója május 25-28. Csalad.hu. Retrieved from <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:0bRM2SuGfYJcsalad.hu/2017/05/22/budapest-a-csaladok-fovarosa-csaladok-budapesti-vilagtalalkozoja-majus-25-28-&cds=1&hl=en&ct=&linksgl=hu>

Bowring, B. (2013). Law, rights and ideology in Russia : landmarks in the destiny of a great power. Routledge.

Buss, D., & Herman, D. (2003). Globalizing Family Values: The Christian Right in International Politics (1st Edition). UPRESS.

Buzogány, A. (2012). Swimming against the Tide: Contested Norms and Antidiscrimination Advocacy in Central and Eastern Europe. In E. Lombardo & M. Forest (Eds.), *The Europeanization of Gender Equality Policies: A Discursive-Sociological Approach* (pp. 145–167). Palgrave Macmillan.

Clifford, B. (2011). The global right wing and the clash of world politics. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Duffy, N. (2016, March 8). Hungary blocks European agreement on LGBT rights. Pinknews. Retrieved from <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2016/03/08/hungary-blocks-european-agreement-on-lgbt-rights/>

Dunai, M., & Szakacs, G. (2017, December 6). Hungary charges Jobbik MEP with spying on EU for Russia. Reuters.

Eidus, J. (2018). Critical situations, fundamental questions and ontological insecurity in world politics. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 21(4), 883–908. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-017-0083-3>

Equal Rights Trust. (2016). Justice or Complicity? LGBT Rights And The Russian Courts. London.

Eriksson, A. (2017, April 28). EP chief faces questions after homophobic 'summit'. Euobserver.eu. Brussels. Retrieved from <https://euobserver.com/lgbt/137725>

Gennaria, S. (2015, December 17). Poland and Hungary May Break EU Bloc at UN on Gay Rights and Much More. C-Fam. Retrieved from [https://c-fam.org/friday\\_fax/poland-hungary-may-break-eu-bloc-un-on-gay-rights-much/](https://c-fam.org/friday_fax/poland-hungary-may-break-eu-bloc-un-on-gay-rights-much/)

Giuffrida, A. (2019, March 30). Christian right summit in Verona draws massive protest. The Guardian. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/30/christian-right-summit-verona-draws-massive-protest>

Grigas, A. (2016). Beyond Crimea : the new Russian empire. Yale University Press.

Guillory, S. (2013, September). Repression and Gay Rights in Russia. The Nation. Retrieved from <https://www.thenation.com/article/repression-and-gay-rights-russia/>

Hanley, T. (2017). Homophobia in Poland and Hungary: Assessing its Political Motives and Influences. In J. Pino & K. Karamanakis (Eds.), *Body Politics: What's the state got to do with it?* (pp. 151–162). Eagle Print Collegiate Press.

Herszenhorn, D., & Bayer, L. (2018, December 7). Hungary and Poland say no to LGBTIQ. Politico. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.eu/article/hungary-and-poland-say-no-to-lgbitq/>

ILGA. (2017). Minorities Report 2017: attitudes to sexual and gender minorities around the world. Retrieved from [https://ilga.org/downloads/ILGA\\_RIWL\\_Minorities\\_Report\\_2017\\_Attitudes\\_to\\_sexual\\_and\\_gender\\_minorities.pdf](https://ilga.org/downloads/ILGA_RIWL_Minorities_Report_2017_Attitudes_to_sexual_and_gender_minorities.pdf)

Joyce, K. (2008, February 14). Missing: The "Right" Babies. The Nation.

Kane, G. (2009). Commentary: Exporting "Traditional" Values. Public Eye. Retrieved from [www.publiceye.org/magazine/v24n4/exporting-traditional-values.html](http://www.publiceye.org/magazine/v24n4/exporting-traditional-values.html)

Klasis, A. (2015). An Unholy Alliance: The European Far Right and Putin's Russia.

Kon, I. (2010). Homophobia as a Litmus Test of Russian Democracy Homophobia as a Litmus Test of Russian Democracy. *Russian Social Science Review*, 51(3), 16–37. <http://doi.org/10.1080/10611428.2010.11065393>

Kovacs, Z. (2019, May 17). Speaker of Hungarian Parliament: Fighting for LGBT adoption is morally equivalent to pedophilia. Index.hu. Retrieved from [https://www.index.hu/english/2019/05/17/speaker\\_of\\_hungarian\\_parliament\\_a\\_normal\\_homosexual\\_does\\_not REGARD\\_himself\\_as\\_equal/?fbclid=IwAR1BswkBCYeab4hndh2z1FSKtHqTIVzHnmWt1olopn2tCILV8fPAA](https://www.index.hu/english/2019/05/17/speaker_of_hungarian_parliament_a_normal_homosexual_does_not REGARD_himself_as_equal/?fbclid=IwAR1BswkBCYeab4hndh2z1FSKtHqTIVzHnmWt1olopn2tCILV8fPAA)

Krekó, P. (2017). Hungary: Crackdown on Civil Society à la Russie Continent.

Krekó, P., & Shekhtovtsova, A. (2016). The Weaponization of Culture : Kremlín's traditional agenda and the export of values to Central Europe. Budapest.

Levintova, H. (2014, February 21). How US Evangelicals Helped Create Russia's Anti-Gay Movement. Mother Jones.

McIntyre, N. (2017, May 26). Hungarian President Viktor Orbán hosts notorious anti-LGBT hate group. The Independent. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/hungary-president-viktor-orban-anti-lgbt-hate-group-of-homophobes-gay-europe-a7758166.html>

Mole, R. C. M. (2016). Nationalism and Homophobia in Central and Eastern Europe. In K. Slootmaekers, H. Touquet, & P. Vermeersch (Eds.), *The EU Enlargement and Gay Politics* (pp. 99 – 122). Palgrave Macmillan.

Mount, Y., & Foia, R. (2018). The End of the Democratic Century: Autocracy's Global Ascendance. Foreign Affairs.

Nardelli, A. (2019, February 15). A Longtime Friend Of Vladimir Putin's Was Invited To Speak At An EU-Funded Conference. Buzzfeed News.

Neumann, Franz L. (1957) The Democratic and the authoritarian state reprinted in tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique, 15(2), 612–636

Nye, J. S. (2004). Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics. New York: Public Affairs.

Oppenheim, M. (2018, October 24). Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán bans gender studies programmes. The Independent. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/hungary-bans-gender-studies-programmes-viktor-orban-central-european-university-budapest-a8599796.html>

Orban, V. (2014). Full text of Viktor Orbán's speech at Béla Tisza (Tiszaúdvar) of 26 July 2014. The Budapest Beacon. Retrieved from <https://budapestbeacon.com/full-text-of-viktor-orbans-speech-at-balle-tisza-nadfurdo-of-26-july-2014/>

Parker, N., Landay, J., & Walcott, J. (2017, 14 October). Putin's speech tank drew up plan to sway 2016 US election - documents. Reuters. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-russia-election-exclusive-idUSKBN17L2N3>

Polyakova, A. (2015). Putinism and the European Far Right Alina.

President, E. of the F. F. (2015). The Russian Federation's National Security Strategy.

Ramsay, A., & Provost, C. (2019, April 25). Revealed: The Trump-linked "Super PAC" working behind the scenes to drive Europe's voters to the far right. Open Democracy. Retrieved from <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/revealed-the-trump-linked-super-pac-working-behind-the-scenes-to-drive-europes-voters-to-the-far-right/>

Rettman, A. (2016, March 8). EU split to sponsor gay rights, boat, upsetting Hungary. Parlamentaire Monitor. Retrieved from [https://www.parlamentairemonitor.nl/9353000/1/9vji5epmj1ey0/vk27d3jymzr7cbx=vh5cb9y0px&tab=1&start\\_tab=0](https://www.parlamentairemonitor.nl/9353000/1/9vji5epmj1ey0/vk27d3jymzr7cbx=vh5cb9y0px&tab=1&start_tab=0)

Rostovskiy, M. (2013, August). Представцы культуры вояна, или Секс как лежебокий занавес. RIA. Retrieved from <https://ria.ru/20130814/956214570.html>

Schimmeleffning, F. (2015). Europeanization beyond Europe. Living Reviews on European Governance, 10.14629/l. Retrieved from <http://europeangovernance-livingreviews.org/Articles/Ireg-2015-1%0A29>

Seres, L. (2017, May). Német leleplezés: Orbán-párti orosz oligarcha pénzélt a Jobbikot? HVG. Retrieved from [https://hvg.hu/lithon/20170524.uzovszki\\_orozgol\\_oligarcha\\_finanszirozas\\_nationalistak\\_Jobbik\\_Magyar\\_Garda](https://hvg.hu/lithon/20170524.uzovszki_orozgol_oligarcha_finanszirozas_nationalistak_Jobbik_Magyar_Garda)

Slootmaekers, K., Touquet, H., & Vermeersch, P. (2016). The EU Enlargement and Gay Politics. Palgrave Macmillan.

Sperling, V. (2015). Sex, Politics, and Putin: Political Legitimacy in Russia. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Steele, B. J., & Homolka, A. (2019). Ontological insecurities and the politics of contemporary populism. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 0(0), 1–8. <http://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2019.1596612>

Szily, L. (2014, September 14). Ezt nem vélhetünk titkoltta el Pröhle Gergely cíkhű.

Takács, J. (2007). Beyond the pink curtain: everyday life of lgbt people in Eastern Europe. Ljubljana: Peace Institute.

Toth, G. A., Kovacs, K., & et al. (2012). Constitution for a disunited nation -On Hungary's 2011 Fundamental Law. CEE Press.

Van Herpan, M. (2015). Putin's propaganda machine: soft power and Russian foreign policy. Rowman & Littlefield.

Vella, M. (2018, December 8). EU split down the middle over Maltese document on LGBTIQ discrimination. Maltatoday. Retrieved from [https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/91491/eu\\_split\\_down\\_the\\_middle\\_over\\_maltese\\_document\\_on\\_lgbtqi\\_discrimination#.XQkKNTmZn5](https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/91491/eu_split_down_the_middle_over_maltese_document_on_lgbtqi_discrimination#.XQkKNTmZn5)

Walker, C. (2018). What Is "Sharp Power"? *Journal of Democracy*, 29(3), 9–23.

Walker, C. (2016). The Authoritarian Threat: The Hijacking of "Sharp Power". *Journal of Democracy*, 27(1), 49–63.

Zakaria, F. (1997). The Rise of Illiberal Democracy. *Foreign Affairs*, November/December, 22–43. Hungary approves partnership legislation. (2008). Pinknews.

Human Rights Campaign. EXPOSED: The World Congress Of Families. (2015).

American activist stands for punishing Pussy Riot and supports Putin as he protects morality. (2012, August 17). Interfax-Religion. Retrieved from <http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&id=9713>

Russian MP Withdraws Bill Taking Children Away from Gay Parents. (2013, October 19). Sputnik News. Moscow. Retrieved from <https://sputniknews.com/russia/20131019184246033-Russian-MP-Withdraws-Bill-Taking-Children-Away-from-Gay-Parents/>

Глава комитета по вопросам семьи Татьяна Плещеева: «Геев нужно лечить». (2019, March 6). Z Nek. Retrieved from [https://www.znak.com/2019/03/06/glava\\_komiteta\\_gosudarstva\\_po\\_voprosam\\_semyi\\_tatyana\\_pleschueva\\_geevu\\_nuzhno\\_lechit.html?fbclid=IwAR0U6HdV0DkIGfGtXWfHUS-pyM8vsiNAmM9uBV0zN8sYpa-aq7V4jdbDjdY](https://www.znak.com/2019/03/06/glava_komiteta_gosudarstva_po_voprosam_semyi_tatyana_pleschueva_geevu_nuzhno_lechit.html?fbclid=IwAR0U6HdV0DkIGfGtXWfHUS-pyM8vsiNAmM9uBV0zN8sYpa-aq7V4jdbDjdY)

The 3 rules of fighting AIDS, according to the Kremlin's experts. (2016, June 1). Meduza.

World Congress of Families XI: The Budapest Family Summit, to be held in Hungary, May 24-28, 2017. (2017). The Christian NewsWire. Retrieved from <http://www.christiannewswire.com/news/297367905.html>

Meghívás a családgyűl államtártáktól a Pride-ra, esze ágában sincs elmenői. (2018, July 4). 24.hu. World Congress of Families. (2017).

Jobbik Wins for Russia's Support in Transcarpathia. (2014, June 19). Daily News Hungary.

2nd Transatlantic Summit: Political Network for Values brings together key political players and civil society leaders in the European Parliament. (2017).

PM Orbán at World Congress of Families XI summit: 2018 will be the year for families. (2017). The new governments in Poland and Hungary

## A THREAT TO NATIONAL SECURITY AND EUROPE'S FIGHT FOR LGBTI-EQUALITY.

Autocracy and soft power - for the past three decades they did not seem to go hand in hand. Nevertheless - the last decade has proven that populist and illiberal forces in the democratic West are prone to policies undertaken by illiberal autocratic states. In the eyes of Russian policy-makers - the demographic decline in Russia and the world possesses 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. This research reveals that the Russian Federation has set up a well-thought soft power strategy regarding LGBTI-rights towards the democratic West. Via outsourcing their soft power to the already existing international anti-LGBTI movement, the Kremlin was able to create a network of (financial and ideological) support for possible cooperation between Russian and European policy-makers. This network seems to fit within the Kremlin's broader foreign policy of undermining Western liberal democracies.

By taking a closer look to the Hungarian and Russian involvement within international anti-LGBTI organisations - like the World Congress of Families - the author of this research was able to prove close and structural ties between high-level Hungarian and Russian government officials and oligarchs. The Hungarian government increased the homo- and transphobic political discourse, enforced policies to foster traditional family values and vetoed every pro-LGBTI rights policy proposal in the Council of the European Union since its involvement in the international anti-LGBTI movement.

**Rémy Bonny** is a Belgian political scientist. Over the years he has been gaining expertise in LGBTI-politics in Central and Eastern Europe. In January 2019, Bonny revealed testimonials about a new LGBTI purge in Chechnya. Behind the scenes he also lobbies at the highest levels of several Western governments to raise attention for the dangers of homo- and transphobic governments on world politics. Bonny has been commenting on several LGBTI-related events for many international media.