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ANALYSIS OF NEOCONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT SLOVENIA

“FOCUS: SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS”

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1. Context and European Dimension

With this report we want to address the neoconservative movement and their political agenda that is focusing on opposing laws of and policies on sexual and reproductive rights. In the past few years, when the debate around the Family code which included the provisions on same-sex partnerships was opened, we have witnessed the emergence of new, seemingly "grassroots" movement(s) (different civil initiatives which can all be linked to Zavod Kul.si and the roman catholic church in Slovenia). These movements are relying on religious beliefs to mobilize citizens to participate actively in politics around the ultra-conservative agenda related to family issues, gender, sexuality and reproductive health. This movement was also the main motivator behind the fall of the Family code in the referendum in 2012 in Slovenia.

Neo-conservative political agenda is set up as a struggle for the defense and protection of "endangered" category securities "of life, family and religious freedom". The Church and its satellite civil society organizations increasingly refrain from using “biblical discourse", substituting it with what appears as a rational, scientific discourse molded into reassuring and populist common-sense statements. In such a way, the Church is secularizing its discourse in order to “clericalize” society. Furthermore, it is successfully reinventing the issues of family and marriage as an ideological battleground of contemporary cultural wars in post-socialist societies, constituting gays and lesbians as the outsiders of the nation. These movements are essentially political initiatives, manipulating religious discourse, increasingly using public and political spaces and instruments for achieving their goals. From 2009 on they have become an integral part of any civil dialogue around sexual and reproductive rights in Slovenia. It the past couple of years it has also become obvious that neoconservative movements are not specific to a single country. Although they may be strongly visible in France, Italy or Poland, they are not limited to these countries, but spread across the continent, some authors¹ are even coming to the conclusion that when we are

¹ Roman Kuhar and David Paternote: Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe (2017)
discussing about neoconservative movements we are discussing about transnational movements. Traces that when we are talking about transnational movements when analyzing neoconservative movements can be found in the fact that specific actions took place on the European level and not national. For example, on 2nd of February 2014 Manif pour Tous, neoconservative movement from France, organized a demonstration on the European level, the demonstration took place in France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Belgium and Slovakia. They have also mobilized for the European elections in 2014 when they started Europe for Family Campaign. Finally as one of the main manifestation of transnational actions of these movements, the European Citizen’s Initiative Mum, Dad & Kids should be mentioned. All the main proponents of neoconservative movements on the national level were also involved in this initiative.

Another fact that proves that we can talk about the transnational movement is also the fact that we can find traces of neoconservative movements and organisations in Brussels. Organisations and initiatives such as Agenda Europe (www.agendaeurope.wordpress.com) and European Dignity Watch (www.europeandignitywatch.org) are one of the main proponents of neoconservative agenda in European institutions. In short, these organisations provide the platform and policy documents for opposition against sexual and reproductive rights in Europe and are involved in lobby work in European institutions.

Slovenia has been the battleground on neo-conservative ideas from 2009 on, the ideas that first resurrected in Slovenia were later transposed to Croatia and strongly contributed to the final result in the referendum around defining the marriage as between a man and a woman in the constitution. Similar actions can be observed also in Poland, Slovakia, France and Spain. Although the manifestations of neoconservative movements vary from one country to another, we can observe usage of similar discourses and strategies against sexual and reproductive rights. Next to the fact that they often use the same argumentation (and the same data on which they build the argument) we can even observe the similarities when it comes to names and logos. For example the logo and materials of the French La Manif pour
Tous (which was one of the most visible manifestations of neoconservative movements in Europe) has been one of the main source of inspiration for reproduction of movements in other countries. This movement has been directly transposed to Italy, where activists named themselves “La Manif pour Tous Italia.” They adopted the same image and just added Italia next to it. Similar manifestation of the logo can be observed also elsewhere (such as in Germany, Slovakia, and Croatia – they are all presenting the image of the only “proper” family; mother, father and children – one boy and one girl). We can see similarities also on the level of strategies, these initiatives often present themselves as concerned citizens and parents, that are worried about the future of the nation.

The following report is predominantly focusing on the analysis of the situation in Slovenia. We are using the experience of Slovenia as a learning model of how neoconservative movements operate in Europe.
2. Introduction

This general outline of the neoconservative movement's rhetoric between 2009 and 2017 aims to shed some light on the Slovenian situation, where in recent years the neoconservative movement has been on the rise. Today, this movement is assuming more and more the characteristics of not only of a social and civil movement, but also especially of what can be considered as groundwork for new political figures. Special emphasis and particularly detailed descriptions are based on the communication rhetoric during the 2015 referendum on the Act Amending the Marriage and Family Relations Act (ZZZDR).

The protagonists of the neoconservative movement in Slovenia were the Civil Initiative for the Family and the Rights of Children in 2012, and the group Koalicijsa za otroke gre! (roughly translated: “Children Are at Stake!” Coalition; literally: “This Is about (Our) Children!”), which included various movements opposing the adoption of ZZZDR. The most vocal objectors of equal marriage rights were Aleš Primc and Metka Zevnik. Aleš Primc had been the leader of the 2001 campaign against the enforcement of the Infertility Treatment and Procedures of Biomedically-Assisted Procreation Act (ZZNPOB) (neoconservative phrasing: act for the fertilisation of single women and lesbians), and was very active during the 2003 efforts to decriminalise prostitution, and in 2012, when he organised the Civil Initiative for the Family and the Rights of Children with Metka Zevnik as the main force against the adoption of the Family Code amendments. In 2015 their group “Za otroke gre!” led a referendum, which managed to reject the draft ZZZDR act that would provide equal marriage rights. After winning the 2015 referendum, Aleš Primc announced he was entering politics.

The neoconservative movement is also very active in expressing support to the head of Slovenia’s leading right-wing political party, and organises various social initiatives
in the fight to ban abortion (daily prayers in front of the maternity hospital where abortions are performed, the Sentinels protest group, etc.). The movement is mainly backed by the Roman Catholic Church, and is sustained in public communications by leading church officials (archbishop, bishops, the president and secretary of the Slovenian Bishops’ Conference). Their main information channel is the web portal www.24kul.si, registered by Zavod kul.si (Institution for the family and the culture of life), whose founder and director is Secretary of the Slovenian Bishops’ Conference Tadej Strehovec. In 2016 their web site and television www.nova24tv.si were launched, this media house was established with the support of SDS (Slovenian Democratic Party). This media house has become one of the main media outlets for right wing political parties. Many individuals, whom we can connect to different neoconservative organisations in Slovenia, also work as journalists for Nova24tv.

As already stated right after the results of the referendum on Novela ZZZDR in 2017 a political party was formed in March of 2017 by Aleš Primc called The Voice of Children and Families — Glas za otroke in družine – GOD.
3. The Situation of LGBT Rights from 2009 to 2014

Family has always been an area of ideological clashes. This also includes the fight for LGBT rights since the 1980’s, when the struggle for LGBT rights became a political issue causing a stir among moral and legal authorities as well as the public. Constant proposals for regulating the legal status of same-sex partnerships and families have been arising since the 1990’s. The Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities assessed that after decades of unregulated legal status, a full-scale regulation of LGBT rights was necessary to end discrimination. In September 2009, the competent ministry presented a new Family Code to replace the more than thirty years old Marriage and Family Relations Act. Particular emphasis was put on three articles that were introducing a new inclusive definition of family, legally and symbolically equating same-sex and heterosexual partnerships and giving same-sex couples the possibility to adopt children. The three-year public debate on the proposed Family Code and its subsequent compromise version led to a new role of the Roman Catholic Church, which has become an increasingly relevant and vocal “civil and social” figure after its rehabilitation in the 1990’s, finding ideological support in placing family and nation as its fundamental social pattern based on a common language.

The compromise version of the Family Code saw the institution of marriage reserved for heterosexual couples, while a special institution (civil partnership) was introduced for same-sex couples, granting the same legal consequences as marriage with the exception of adoption rights, which were denied to same-sex couples. The Slovenian National Assembly passed the Family Code on 16 June 2011, and the referendum against it that followed seemed to be fuelled, whether consciously or unconsciously, by political and ideological feelings rather than content-related motives. The Family Code defines family as cohabitation of a child with one or two parents or another
adult who is taking care of the child. This definition provides no grounds for claiming that it would destroy traditional family, and especially for claiming that it threatens the nation's well-being and survival.

On 3 February 2012 the Civil Initiative for the Family and Rights of Children submitted the necessary signatures to call for a referendum. Before the referendum the Family Code was sustained by several Slovenian professional organisations, such as: the Chamber of Clinical Psychologists, the Department of Social Pedagogy and the professorship of Psychology at the Ljubljana Faculty of Education, and the Slovenian Association of Psychologists. At the referendum, which was held on 25 March 2012, 45 percent of voters were in favour of the Family Code, and 55 percent were against. The turnout was 30 percent.

The role of the Catholic Church in those three years is evident in the establishment of satellite organisations that often take over civil initiatives while acting under its auspices, on its behalf or in close collaboration. The Church remains strategically in the background, since its moral reputation is often tarnished by sexual and financial scandals, while its puppet organisations act at the forefront. One such organisation is the Civil Initiative for the Family and the Rights of Children, which was one of the principal opponents of the Family Code. The connection between the Catholic Church and the Civil Initiative is shown by the fact that the Civil Initiative’s web site www.24kul.si was at first hosted by the official server of the Slovenian Catholic Church. Moreover, the founder of Zavod 24kul, the association that owns the above-mentioned web site, is Tadej Strehovec, the secretary of the Slovenian Bishops’ Conference Justice and Peace Commission. Strehovec made public comments on the Family Code on behalf of the Catholic Church and participated as its representative at the second reading of the Family Code at the Committee on Labour, Family, Social Policy and Disability in the National Assembly. The link between the Catholic Church and the Civil Initiative is also evident in that the Civil Initiative leader, Aleš Primc, held lectures and speeches in churches and rectories, urging churchgoers to vote against the Family Code at the referendum.
On 5 January 2012, the Justice and Peace Commission held a press conference rejecting claims that due to the referendum the Catholic Church could bring about a “cultural clash”. “We strongly reject the claims,” they wrote, “that we are trying to turn the debate on the Family Code into a debate on the Catholic Church,” since, according to them, the controversial questions about family are by their own nature justified and should be tackled “with a well-argued debate and tolerant dialogue, rather than fomenting anarchical cultural clashes.”

After the March referendum the issue of LGBT rights was at a standstill for almost two years. This was partly due to the unstable political situation of the Slovenian government.
4. Relevant Events in 2015, 2016 and 2017

In December 2014 the United Left submitted to parliament the act amending the Marriage and Family Relations Act (ZZZDR), proposing an amendment to the third paragraph, which states that marriage is a “legally regulated life union between a man and a woman”, while the new definition would be “legally regulated life union between two persons”. This way, same-sex and heterosexual couples would be granted the same rights and obligations.

The National Assembly passed the amended act on 3rd of March 2015 with 51 votes in favour and 28 against. The opponents of the amended act granting the same right to marriage to heterosexual and homosexual couples, formed a group “Za otroke gre!”, and they had from 23rd of March 2015 to 26th of April 2015 to collect 40,000 signatures for submitting a request to call a legislative referendum. On 23rd of March 2015 the group, strongly supported by the Catholic Church, started collecting signatures in front of administrative units, managing to collect the necessary number of signature within a few days. On 26th of March 2015 National Assembly rejected the call for a referendum with a 53 to 21 vote, thus bringing the collecting of signatures to a halt. The majority of members of parliament argued that the referendum initiative was referring to an act for which a referendum could not be deemed constitutionally acceptable.

The group “Za otroke gre!” then filed a complaint with the Constitutional Court on 2nd of April 2015 contesting the National Assembly’s decision to reject the referendum. The group proposed that the National Assembly’s decision be overturned and the referendum be allowed. The Constitutional Court ruled in favour of the group’s complaint on 22nd of October 2015, thus allowing the referendum to be held. Five constitutional judges upheld the referendum initiative, four were against, and respective separate opinions were included. On 30th of October 2015 the group “Za otroke gre!” submitted to the National Assembly their request to call for a referendum with 48,000 collected signatures.
On 4th of November 2015 the National Assembly decreed that the referendum on the Novela ZZZDR would be held on 20th of December 2015. Official referendum campaign started on 20th of November 2015 and ended at midnight on 18th of December 2015.

Interestingly, early public opinion surveys showed a 60-percent support for the rejection of ZZZDR, and a 40-percent support for the implementation of the act, meaning a victory for the neoconservative movement against equal marriage rights was foreseen.

On 16th of February 2016, the website www.24kul.si published an article entitled “The List of Members of the Abortion Lobby who are Against the Rights of the Unborn Girls and Boys!” The article displayed a large photograph, where a male hand is threateningly pressing a black gun to a pregnant belly. In it, they have listed the full names of people, who they introduced as radical activists and advocates of killing children, and “who advocate for free surgical abortions of the unborn women, for homosexuals and lesbians, and for the extinction of Slovenian nation and its culture.” They have described them as “members of a dangerous secret organisation, which is very threatening, and collaborates with state authorities in its wish to destroy the Slovenian nation.” As written in the article, “the financially privileged Slovenian abortion lobby is formed by members of radical leftist organisations, known LGBTQ activists, feminist lobbies, and others. All of these organisations have several things in common, firstly, that they are richly financed with taxpayers’ money — according to Erar data, they have received tens of millions of euros for a single goal: to enforce pro-abortion legislation and spread intolerance towards unborn girls and boys.”

The individuals on the list of the so-called “abortion lobby” are supposedly responsible for “the cultural death, which is destructive and catastrophic not only for the unborn children who are killed on surgical tables, but also for their mothers and fathers who suffer from post-abortion syndrome, and for the Slovenian society, which
has one of the lowest fertility rates in the world.” The individuals are defined as culprits, causing mental health difficulties for those that decide to get an abortion.

The article used a specific vocabulary, which has been developed since the polemics in the press of the early 1990s, collected in the book Abortion — the right to choose? (1991). In this vocabulary, the foetuses are called children or unborn children; abortion is treated as homicide, and anyone who has anything to do with it is a murderer. There is an absence of different opinions in the text, as well as any arguments whatsoever. Using hate-speech, it marks specific individuals as advocates for the murder of children.

However, the freedom to choose to give birth to children is specified in Article 55 of the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia (1991). The right to artificially terminate a pregnancy is thus governed by legislation. Nevertheless, the article presented above considers the actual act of performing this constitutional right as murder of unborn girls and boys. In the text, the issue of constitutional freedom is accompanied with a comment that it is “a controversial right, which is not written in the constitution, but was made up by the Constitutional Court in the 90-ies.”

The text of the author, who used a pseudonym Tine Belin, was published on www.24kul.si after a group of 165 individuals and 14 civil society organisations have sent an initiative to protect the constitutional rights of women to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia and other relevant institutions on 15th of February 2016. The initiative was concerned with the rallies in front of the Clinic of Gynaecology and Obstetrics in Ljubljana, which were organised by Zavod božji otroci (The Children of God Institute) and where protesters prayed “for life — for the termination of abortion at Ljubljana’s hospital.”

With the public initiative, the signatories wanted to convey the message that everyone has the right to speak freely, but that public prayers in front of the clinic are expressed in a manner that disproportionately interferes with the human rights of other people, especially with the right of personal dignity and safety, the freedom of
choice in childbirth, and the protection of privacy. The individuals who signed the initiative are certain that the attendees of the rallies in front of the Gynaecology Clinic are exploiting people’s religious sentiments and are placing pressure on doctors and other medical staff, as well as women, whom they are supposedly trying to protect. The article on www.24kul.si displayed the commitment to the realisation of the institutional right of the Freedom of Choice in Childbirth Act as a commitment to kill children on surgical tables.

A report was filled with the police against those in charge of the creation and publication of the article. Vič Police Station assessed the report and charged them with an offence under Article 159 of the Penal Code — for defamation, however, under Article 168 of the Code, the prosecution of this offence begins with private action. The criminal complaint was filed on 16th of May 2016 to the District Public Prosecutor’s Office of the Republic of Slovenia in Ljubljana. The outcome of the procedure has not yet been revealed at the time this text was written.

Appearance of Angelca Likovič in a TV broadcast Tarča on national TV has also resonated in Slovenia, where she, using the discourse of the previously mentioned movements, among other things said: “Every single child is conceived with love, with the exception of those women who were raped. But the women who are raped also need our help, so they can give birth to children, because then they will be happy and we can punish their rapists to a one to ten year prison sentence,”

The same can be said for a movie that was projected on the stairwell of the Franciscan Church on the Prešeren Square in Ljubljana, which promoted the idea that life starts after conception. The movie follows the *imaginarium*, which represents foetuses as children (the image of it replaces the failed arguments at this stage).

A political party was formed in March of 2017 by Aleš Primc The Voice of Children and Families — Glas za otroke in družine – GOD. One of the more prominent members of the party is the previously mentioned Likovič, who also ran for president. The party represents the institutionalisation of the above-mentioned requests and
opinions; article three of the party’s programme states: “It is unacceptable to interfere with the lives of unborn children, the sick and the elderly”

A lot of public attention was also given to the recent statements of Boštjan M. Zupančič, an ex European Court of Human Rights judge, in which he advocated for an extreme antiabortion stance. For example, right after her death, he characterised Simone Veil, a well-known French politician, who as Minister of Health legalised abortion in 1975, as the “biggest murderer of all times”.
5. Analysis of the General Neoconservative Discourse with Concrete Examples

a) Moral panic and threatening the existing social order

Throughout the adoption and referendum on the Family Code, and later on the Novela ZZZDR in 2015, opponents avoided using so called biblical discourse, or the reference to the argument of the Bible, which has long been a key reference point for church opposition to same-sex marriages and homosexuality in general. In Slovenia, before 2009, this was an established practice in all debates on the legal regulation of the rights and obligations of same-sex couples (Mencin Ćeplak and Kuhar, 2010; Kuhar, 2015). From 2009 onwards (church) opponents started using a discourse that works rationally, scientifically, calming and based on "common sense" - at least at first glance. According to Kuhar (2015), data from scientific research, which is used by opponents in the argumentation, is almost always adapted or reversed by adhering to their arguments and the view that legislation that equates the rights of same-sex and heterosexual couples should not be adopted, but when you look at the results of these research you notice that the corellation that is presented by opponents does not exist.

Similarly, Ana Marija Sobočan and Senja Pollak (2016), who, on the basis of the analysis of the media discourse of three media - Demokracija, Dnevnik and Mladina - find that the discourse of opponents is based on the establishment of moral panic and the explanation that legislation threatens the natural order and natural family, and announces the decay of values in society. Thus, at the time of the adoption of the Family Code in 2009 and 2012, they tried to reduce the issue of same-sex couples to the issue of aids and recreate the moral panic of the 1980s. Tadej Strehovec, then secretary of the Commission for Justice and Peace at the Roman Catholic Church in Slovenia, operated in a series of media appearances with the calculation that children in same-sex families are 435 times more likely to be exposed to HIV. It was not explained what such exposure means, but still this seed is enough
for the hint of moral panic. Just as there was enough clue given by the SDS deputy Alenka Jeraj in the Reports on TV Slovenia, when she talked about the number of same-sex couples who were registered under the Act on the Registration of Same-Sex Partnerships, adopted in 2005 by Janša government. She said: "There are 24 couples registered, of which two registrations were terminated because of the partner's death - and we would not have heard that several days ago, they were most often infected with HIV as homosexual men ..." (TV Slovenija, 2009) Moral panic is also being constructed by opponents with introducing new terms that sound frightening and suggestive of conspiracy theories (eg gender theory, queersexuals, etc.).

The authors (Sobočan and Pollak, 2016) further conclude that advocates are often portrayed as a social and political elite that threatens the human rights of heterosexual individuals. In this case, the story is inverted. Through the established discourse, the social minority (gays and lesbians) constitutes itself as a social elite that fights against ordinary citizens and, through leverage of power, seeks to provide the privileges that they do not have.

According to Jadranka Anić (2015), this kind of discourse is possible and successful due to the history and the relationship between the state and the church in the time of Yugoslavia. Historical antagonism between communism and the Roman Catholic Church helped to create a polarizing relationship. When opponents, through their discourse, portray the arrangement of same-sex partnerships as an ideological project of the ruling elites and place themselves on the place of those who represent the "natural" values of the nation, an antagonism similar to the antagonism between power and the church in the time of socialism arises. Consequently, this topic is polarizing, which is also reflected in the opinion polls conducted before the referendum on the Novela ZZZDR in 2015. The percentage of those who supported the legislation and those who opposed it was very similar. According to Episcenter, the opinion poll conducted by TSmedia showed that 48.5 percent of the respondents are in favor of the Amendment to the ZZZDR, while the percentage of those opposed to enforcement is 51.5 percent (Kaker, 2015). The regulation of same-sex partnership
is therefore one of the topics through which it is possible to mobilize and engage many individuals. That the mobilization of potential voters is one of the main motives of opponents, has clearly demonstrated the confrontation at the announcement of the results of the referendum on the Novela ZZZDR, in which Aleš Primc, one of the main protagonists of the For Children's Saga, announced the establishment of a new political party.

The change in the argumentation techniques and the discursive twists that we describe were the factor that in the course of both referendum debates (in 2012 and 2015) moved the balance in favor of the neoconservative ideas and movements, that have sprung to life over the last few years. Their discourse has become a constant in the global political space. This can also be seen in the last elections for the president of the United States. Most people who voted for Trump were with lower education, white race and mostly men (CNN, 2016). What is even more important, however, is the fact that - as was pointed out in the political analysis of CNN (2016) - the decisive factor at elections where the people who did not engage in political sphere for many years. These are the ones that Trump addressed with a speech that does not belong to an established politician. He addressed them as someone who is part of their group, which is the same as those who are "victims" of the same political elites. It is also important to address them in a simple language and with rhetoric that offered simple answers. The principle of simplicity also follows the opponents of the Family Code. Their argumentation rests upon the reference to the common sense, which is grounded in the essentialist understanding of sexuality and sexual relations (eg "a child needs a father and a mother").

It seems that political voices seem to bring faces that, at least at first glance, are not part of established political elites. In the case of both referendums on regulating the legal status of homosexual partners in Slovenia in 2012 and 2015, the protagonists were put on the forefront by individuals who had not previously been part of the (right-wing) political elite, but new faces that represented themselves as the people's voice. Through various petitions and the collection of signatures, which were carried out with the strong support of the entire right-wing political pole and the Roman
Catholic Church, they attempted to create an image of massive and great support, that is, movements that come from people for people and are basically not politically motivated. However, the establishment of a new political party (see page 16) raises this kind of image and reveals that the collateral surplus of victory in both referendums was also the acquisition of new voices for the right-wing political option or for the newly founded party Glas za otoke in družine (Voice for Children and Family). On the basis of published political program of the party, it can be assumed that it will basically be a populist party that will build its image on pleasing the people. It will also rely strongly on the construction of a cult of personality (Aleš Primc and Metka Zevnik). The construction of the media image of the two most prominent faces is even more important because it is a populist party. The findings from numerous studies show that voters of such parties usually give their vote due to the affiliation and pleasure of the party leader and not because of the agreement with the party's policies and ideologies (Padahzur and Bricht 2002; Van der Brug and Mughan 2007; Lange 2007).
6. Neoconservative discourse and concrete examples

To recap, the aim of neoconservative rhetoric during referendum campaign was to isolate the LGBT community, making it look distant, hostile, aggressive, and like a rich elite group; all the things that the average “normal” majority of the population is not. They would often come up with certain words to make them sound even more threatening (eg. queersexuals, transexuals). This approach is not limited to the LGBT community, as this type of communication can be found on their web sites in relation to any topic that is not aligned with the traditional conservative ideology and beliefs (abortion, feminism, etc.).

The central part of their discourse is presenting homosexuality as a threat – first and foremost towards “innocent” children, but also towards “real” family. Analysing this discourse reveals clear and simple problem-solution pairings, where a problem can be solved by eliminating (in legal terms, symbolically, or physically) those who constitute that problem (homosexuals). It ends up becoming a manifestation of hatred towards a certain social group, masked as care and fear for the children and the future of the Slovenian nation. This way moral panic and a discourse of endangerment were established, which are indeed part of the basic principles by which LGBT opponents work. The homophobic discourse was rarely directly hateful in public media, and ultimately anyone who was accused of being homophobic rejected such criticism, claiming they have “nothing against homosexuals, but...” Such interpretations can in fact depoliticise and personalise homophobia: the problem is intolerant, homophobic individuals, who are shown as “sick”, while homophobia is understood as a mere manifestation of personal stances. This way they virtually limit the problem to a question of phobia as an individual phenomenon, concealing wider social implications of homophobia. It was indeed psychology (along with oversimplified psychological explanations found in mass media and public debates) that systematically replaced political explanations (homophobia as structural and institutional repression) with personal ones. However, political
homophobia is one of the manifestations of today’s populism, where certain groups use homophobia as a political strategy. This may cause the protection of one minority’s rights to be used for the political and social exclusion of another minority, which is in fact an increasingly common characteristic of today’s (Western) right-wing populism functioning from a democratic perspective: by defending the liberal values of Western democracy – and human rights in particular – it only recognises them selectively; human rights of gays and lesbians as opposed to human rights of Muslims, human rights of women as opposed to human rights of migrants, etc. Political homophobia is tightly intertwined with the persistent patterns of gender, social and racial inequality, and it represents a strategy by the State or certain political figures for either maintaining the current power situation or for gaining positions of power. This is achieved by creating a “homosexual threat” against which they organise their efforts while keeping their own (legal, symbolic or political) privileges. Specifically, political homophobia can manifest itself as incidents of moral panic, which is a strategic political mechanism whose role it is to maintain the status quo: i.e. maintaining the hegemony of a nuclear heterosexual family and a heteronormative social order.

Most of the LGBT-related neoconservative discourse is conveyed through two basic concepts: homosexuality as a threat to children, and as a threat to heterosexual families.

**Homosexuality as a threat to children**

Perceiving biological parenthood as the best possible form of parenthood, while social parenthood is seen as a mere approximation, which in the case of same-sex parents is even perceived as dangerous for children, since it presumes a very particular, supposedly hedonistic homosexual lifestyle that’s incompatible with the “innocence of the children”, whereby it is implied that homosexual relationships are primarily about sex. Indeed, linking children and sexuality is a populist angle that effectively creates moral panic. Very clear, if not necessarily explicit insinuations can
be noticed in the neoconservative discourse that children in same-sex families (or indeed in the company of homosexuals) will be somehow (physically, verbally, symbolically) sexually abused, and the child’s innocence will be violated due to the presence of an unnatural/corrupt/deviated homosexual. In line with this kind of presupposition one way of presenting homosexuals as a threat to innocent children was the interpretation that “radical homosexual activists” are trying to promote homosexuality among youth, in particular in schools, as something normal. It must be noted that sexual abuse of children was never explicitly mentioned in their communication. Their populism is hidden in the very fact that these insinuations are always concealed behind seemingly rational, even supposedly scientifically grounded arguments, which are strategically conceived in such a way that will play on people’s emotions, drawing their strength from pre-existing prejudice. One such example is the notion of a particular homosexual lifestyle, i.e. the idea that there is a clear line between “us” and “them”, who differ from us not only in their sexual orientation, but on a much deeper level that’s linked to the way individual people live.

EXAMPLES

• Children will be adopted into unions of two men, women, transsexuals and queersexuals.
• Gender and sexual orientation experimenting will be made legal in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools.
• This is about protecting our children.
• They want to give our children up for adoption to two gays, lesbians and transsexuals.
• Grandparents won’t be able to adopt their grandchildren.
• This is about protecting children, fathers, mothers and grandparents.
• Child adoption is not a human right.
• Legalising motherhood trading.
• We oppose the abuse of artificial insemination for healthy lesbians at the expenses of the taxpayers.
• Using donors’ semen and eggs means that a child is virtually taken away from their mother or father or even both parents.
• Declaring homosexual relationships as marriage creates a supposed “right” to use artificial reproductive technologies, as they abolish the legal meaning of natural, fundamental procreation.
• Introducing homosexual sex education in schools without the parents’ consent.
• Teachers’ conscientious objection (teachers will be forced to teach this stuff).
• Introducing gender theory in schools.
• Our children will be corrupted in schools.

Homosexuality as a threat to heterosexual families

In this case same-sex marriage is supposed to be a threat to natural heterosexual families, and consequently to the nation as such. The argument of naturalness in describing institutions like family was linked to the interpretation whereby only one form of true family actually exists: mother, father and child. This argumentation is based on a binary distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality separating natural and normal from unnatural and abnormal.

On a form level, their statements appear seemingly tolerant and sound. They would focus on natural heterosexuality and the natural role of the father and the mother, strategically ignoring the social construct of these phenomena. The argument of biology was used as something that enables not only the reproduction of men and women, but the reproduction of the nation itself. This is where political homophobia is most tightly linked to the issue of the supposed threat to “our nation”. What appears as a rational, scientifically sound argument on the outside is in fact tugging at people’s heartstrings and playing on nationalistic feelings, which constitutes homosexuals not only as the Other within a Nation, but also as the Other who is against the Nation. This is at the base of the fundamental neoconservative notion
that family and children must be protected if we are to “survive as a people, a society, a culture and a civilisation”.

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• The abolition of marriage between wife and husband and the meaning of a mother and a father for a child will cause children to be separated from their fathers or mothers or even both parents, not due to extreme circumstances, but systematically and calculatedly.

• Declaring homosexual relationships as marriage destroys the legal principle whereby the fundamental basis for establishing rights and duties of a mother and a father is a biological one: the mother, who has given birth to the child, and the father, who had conceived the child with her.

• If we let activists achieve what they have set out to do, all that will be left of marriage will be a government friendships registry.

• This is an act that on a European level belongs to the kind of legislation that radical LGBTQ activists have been pushing. Their umbrella organisation, one of the biggest lobby groups in the world, ILGA-Europe, demands the introduction of a kind of legislation that would persecute and financially punish all those who are opposed to gender theory and to child adoption in homosexual, lesbian, transsexual and queersexual unions.

• We must protect our values, our children, and family.

• This is about protecting family as the biggest value of them all.

• This is about natural values, tradition and freedom.

• We shall not give up family; it is a sacred union.

• This is about disrespecting parenthood.

• This is about abolishing marriage between husband and wife; now it will only be person 1 and person 2.

• Marriage has been established for creating a family in a natural way.

• There is a risk that lesbians will be allowed to get artificially inseminated.

• Three or even more gays and lesbians will be able to get married; where will this lead?
• The ideological activist argumentation is that “gender is no longer an essential part of marriage”.
• Same-sex marriage is not a human right.

Christianophobia

Over the past year an increasingly frequent use of the “threatened” formula can be observed in the neoconservative movement. They speak of Christianophobia, perceiving themselves as a threatened minority who is protecting the values of society and is under constant pressure. From that formula a kind of rhetoric is drawn against LGBT people, against the legislation enabling the secularity of the State, and against abortion rights.

The pillars that give additional strength to this notion of homosexuality as a threat are the mass media promoting a radical homosexual agenda (victimisation of the neoconservative movement), which contributes to the loss of Christian values (a threat to Christian values).

Article 7 of the Slovenian Constitution says, “The state and religious communities shall be separate. Religious communities shall enjoy equal rights; they shall pursue their activities freely.”

The interpretation of the above-mentioned constitutional article in the neoconservative discourse: “Article 7 of the Constitution legalises a Slovenian version of the apartheid. Through this constitutional violence they have imposed atheism as a ‘national religion’, at the same time legalising the discrimination of Catholics and other religious citizens. The state has declared atheists, secularists and Christianophobes as first-class citizens, constitutionally declaring Christians and other religious people as second-class citizens who must be separated from the state due to their religious beliefs. Article 7 of the ‘modern and progressive’ Slovenian Constitution does not speak of ‘atheists and the state’ or of ‘homosexual activists and
the state’; it only punishes ‘members of religious communities’. Slovenia is the only country in the European Union to have legalised a ban on religious education in public schools with a 2000 Constitutional Court decree. At the same time these radical secularists have used Article 7 of the Constitution to impose a compulsory ‘liberal religious education’ in schools, meaning radical sex education promoting contraception and abortion without parental consent, as well as homosexual indoctrination negating the significance of a woman and a man, a father and a mother, for the birth, development and upbringing of a child.”

In the context of Christianophobia, LGBT people are particularly exposed as “the rich homosexual lobby elite”, “gay activists fighting for their privileges” or “gender theory activists”.

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- This kind of atmosphere, along with the media, is one of the main causes of the de-Christianisation of our children in public schools and institutions, where civil servants all too often still try to turn them into aggressive and intolerant atheists who are to reject religion and family life.
- This constitutionally discriminatory logic is most apparent in the financing of atheistic, pro-abortion and militantly secular organisations that have been financially substantially rewarded out of the state budget for years for spreading their secular ideas; on the other hand, financing religious organisations such as charities, religious movements and missionary organisations within the Catholic Church is practically forbidden.
Abortion

Article 55 of the Slovenian Constitutions states, “Everyone shall be free to decide whether to bear children. The state shall guarantee the opportunities for exercising this freedom and shall create such conditions as will enable parents to decide to bear children.”

Abortions may be performed on request (with the gynaecologist’s referral) up until the tenth week of pregnancy, while in case of a more advanced pregnancy the decision depends on a committee for pregnancy termination present in every gynaecological ward. There is no age limit for abortion and no parental authorisation is necessary for underage persons. During an initiative dubbed “Week of the Child” in October 2016, Zavod Živim (Institute Alive), an institute working in the field of unplanned pregnancies and abortion, screened a promotional film against abortion as murder on the facade of the Franciscan church on Prešeren Square in Ljubljana. The national television made it theme of the week, dedicating major airtime to the debate on the purposefulness of abortion rights during peak time programming.

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• The right to abortion has a male point of view too. Men, too, are victims of abortion and heroes of the victory over them.
• Planned Parenthood is killing children who survive abortion, and are one of the most active organisations for the abolition of marriage between wife and husband and the traffic of aborted children's bodies.
• Slovenia is the only country in the world to have abortion in its constitution, whereby violence against unborn girls and boys is legalised.
• Abortions are performed on a regular basis.
• Abortions are now even performed on ten-year-olds.
• Little girls who have made an abortion are more likely to experience mental health issues.
• Abortion represents a 65-percent bigger risk for clinical depression.
• Why are there so few children in Slovenia? Because of abortions and anti-family policies!
• Slovenia is a country where the extremist anti-family Left encourages divorce.
• Slovenia is one of the few countries in the world where contraception is free.
• Compulsory anti-family policies in primary and secondary schools.
• Women risk premature death due to abortion.
• Pope Francis: Abortion is a crime. It is the same as the Mafia.
• A woman who has survived abortion.
7. Main protagonists of Neoconservative Movement in Slovenia

a) Aleš Primc

Aleš Primc is the leading face of the neoconservative movement in Slovenia. He is a philosopher educated, and graduated at the Faculty of Arts of University of Ljubljana with the thesis "The Problem of Spiritual Science at Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer". Although he presents himself in the public as politically undefined, we can quickly see that he has been politically active for more than 20 years. He was initially active in the youth of the Slovene Christian Democrats, and later became their President. After 2000 he moved to SLS (Slovenian People’s Party), where he headed the Ljubljana City Council committee for several years. Later, he became the chairman of the SLS Main Board, but in 2008 he resigned from that position. He is employed at the Ministry of Agriculture, in the Agency for Agricultural Markets and Rural Development, where he works as a supervisor at the Department for the Implementation of Controls for Rural Development and Agricultural Markets.

b) Metka Zevnik

Metka Zevnik is one of the leading faces of neoconservative movements in Slovenia. Although she is presented to the public primarily as a "concerned citizen", it is clear that she has quite a few political experiences. In the mandate from March 2013 to December 2014, Metka Zevnik was a member of the Executive Board of the SLS (Slovene People’s Party) and the Chair of the SLS Expert Committee on Education, Science and Sport and a member of the SLS Expert Committee on Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. She was also the vice-president of SLS Kranj Committee. She is a member of the Managing Board of the Slovenian Women’s Association at SLS. She is a university engineer in chemical technology. She was a lecturer at the high school of the Biotechnical Centre Naklo; she also runs the parish Karitas. In 2010, she received a plaque from the City of Kranj for lifelong work in the field of education and integration of education within the labour market.
In the period of the referendum campaign in 2015, she was mainly constituted as the president of the grandparents' association, and based her speech on the assumption of a "potted" right of both parents and grandparents to co-decide on changes to the Marriage and Family Relations Act.

c) Tadej Strehovec

After graduating from high school in Ljubljana, Tadej Strehovec continued his studies at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Ljubljana, where he graduated in 1999 in theology, received a M.Sc. in Theology in 2001, and received his doctorate in science in 2005, he continued his post-doctoral studies, at Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium). Since 2007, he has been a member of the Commission of Justice and Peace at the Slovene Bishops' Conference, member of the Bioethics Group at COMECE (Belgium) (2010) and a member of the European Commission's Evaluators and Experts Group on Ethics (2006). Since 2006 he has been an Assistant at the Department of Church Law and Moral Theology at the Faculty of Theology, which is part of the University of Ljubljana. He is a member of the Order of Small Brothers (Franciscans). In the spring of 2013, the bishops of Slovenia appointed him as Secretary General and a spokesman for the Slovene Bishops' Conference.

Tadej Strehovec is one of the leaders of the neoconservative movement in Slovenia, although he is not often seen in the public or is not presented as one of the main faces. He is also the founder and director of the Institute for the Family and Culture of Life KUL.si, which is the leading organization of neoconservative movements in Slovenia. The institution is described by the founder as a non-profit organization, which was created with the aim of promoting the fundamental values of human life, human rights, family, solidarity, democracy, freedom and active citizenship. They state that it was established in 2009 by young active citizens who want to contribute to a democratic, plural, open and content richer public dialogue on the most important social issues.
d) Angelca Likovič

Angelca Likovič, besides Aleš Primc and Metka Zevnik, is one of the most recognizable faces of neoconservative movement in Slovenia. In her speeches, she often emphasizes that she was a teacher of Janez Janša, the president of the SDS. She was a pedagogical adviser at the Institute for Education, and for six years she was Director of Delavska Univerza in Grosuplje. For eighteen years, she was headmistress at the Majda Vrhovnik Primary School in Ljubljana. She has been active in politics since the 1990s. She was the president of the municipal council in Grosuplje, in local elections she run for the position of mayor but was not elected. In 2001 she was State Secretary at the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. For a number of years she was considered as an important member of political party SDS, with which she was also closely linked through business. For example, between 1996 and 2001, she held a share of the Company for Investment and Development (DIR) Grosuplje together with Municipality of Grosuplje, Silva Predalič, former wife of Janez Janša, and Branko Kastelic, former president of the management board of a company Imosa. This construction company bought a plot of land from Janez Janša in 2005 in Trenta at a high price.
8. Communication and Responses to Neoconservative Discourse

Below are given some principles designed for speeches and general communication of topics such as LGBT rights, child adoption, marriage and abortion, including basic assertions on what should be avoided and what kind of rhetoric is considered adequate. The following few chapters are based on analysis of rhetoric used in campaign in Ireland and USA when talking about marriage equality and are primarily based on the book *Ireland Says Yes: The Inside Story of How the Vote for Marriage Equality Was Won*.

Based on the analysis of the discourse that won the referendum in Ireland we can conclude that it is important to produce positive contents, calmly discerning the opponent’s fabrications, and to avoid reacting to their provocations. Nonverbal and rhetorical messages should be based on neutral and affirmative communication. Also the ones confronted with neoconservative discourse should avoid responding to the opponent’s provocations and reacting to specific manipulations.

Based on the analysis of the referendum primarily in Ireland and in Slovenia we could conclude that the following topics should be kept in check when confronted with neoconservative movement.

**DO NOT GO INTO ANY OTHER TOPIC**

Based on analysis of used discourse we could observe that it is important to enter into any other topic as with this you lose focus. The speakers should only focus on the established lines of communication. Even if the speaker is asked an unexpected question they should go back to a positively set line of communication.
CONNECT TO THEIR CROWD AND ESTABLISH A POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH TRADITIONAL VALUES

Based on the analysis of the discourse used by proponents of marriage equality in different referendum campaigns we could observe that the message that this change does not bring any threat to traditional marriage.

DO NOT OBJECTIFY – FOCUS ON THE EMOTIONAL ASPECT

Based on the analysis of the discourse used by proponents of marriage equality in different referendum campaigns we could observe that it is important not to speak of marriage as a right or a package of benefits. But that is more important in highlighting marriage as a set of rights and obligations, it is better to emphasise its emotional aspect.

DO NOT DISMISS OTHER PEOPLE’S TROUBLES AND DO NOT COMPARE PROBLEMS

Based on the analysis of the discourse used by proponents of marriage equality in different referendum campaigns we could observe that it is good not to compare the discrimination experienced by LGBT people with the discrimination faced by other groups.

DO NOT DICICTATE AND DO NOT PREACH

Based on the analysis of the discourse used by proponents of marriage equality in different referendum campaigns we could observe that it is important not to impose opinions on the LGBT community to journalists, viewers, listeners, readers, etc.

Also messages that lead to confrontation with opposing activists in any way – a defying attitude towards the opponent’s inaccurate and misleading statements could
cause people to focus on those very statements. The focus should be given on the common values of family, love, respect, tolerance and justice.

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9. Golden rules of communication – conveying the right message in the right way

Based on the analysis of the discourse that has been used in USA and Ireland when talking about marriage equality we could conclude that there are a couple of main points that follow the line of communication when being faced by a strong opposition, these are:

- Always communicate in line with the instructions
- Be personal, sincere, genuine, emotional
- Ignore the opponent’s provocations and lies
- Be respectful or at least indifferent towards your opponents
- Emphasise your own positive messages
- Keep repeating your messages
- Use personal examples – what this issue means to you
- Speak softly and sincerely
- Use simple words
10. Relations with Political and Other Figures and the Media

Based on the analysis of situation in different countries that are being faced with neoconservative movements we can conclude that one of the key elements is connecting with political decision-makers, other non-governmental organisations and the media. All three fields can alternately help create pressure or increase public support. One characteristic of relations with political decision-makers, other prominent figures and the media in particular is that these relations demand constant activity and fostering, as well as adding new contacts. Not only formal, but especially informal networking is often decisive. An expanded support base can alternately create the pressure or the support that is necessary according to the current social atmosphere and the turns that political or other civil society interests take.

a) Relations with political figures

Long-term and continuous tracking of the political positions on certain topical issues gives a better view over the current political map. Possible support connections can become more delineated, and possible political support for specific goals may take shape. The most interested political figures are the ones who need to take the time to learn the appropriate rhetoric and communication in specific situations. With coordinated public and media appearances that are enhanced with the appropriate rhetorical mechanisms they reach a wide circle of the public.

b) Relations with other non-governmental organisations and active individuals

This category includes cooperation with other non-governmental organisations and active individuals working on other relevant fields, yet show support when it comes to
common issues or activities for the common good and the protection of human rights. Connecting about other issues strengthens mutual cooperation and trust, which can encourage the involvement of a wider part of the public during a campaign and important social developments. Any involved individual and activist needs to be prepped with the appropriate rhetoric and communication techniques, as well as the right response techniques for specific situations.

c) Media relations

Informal relations with individual journalists are a key factor in contributing to spreading the appropriate rhetoric and argumentations concerning certain social issues. Appropriate material, qualified speakers and timely statements need to be constantly available, professional PR needs to be provided and informal relations with journalists need to be fostered. Journalists should be kept informed through different channels, personal relations and compelling material based on the type of the media outlet.

The main neoconservative media and web portals in Slovenia:

- www.24kul.si
- www.nova24tv.si
- www. demokracija.si
- www. reporter.si
- www.iskreni.net
- http://www.zavod-zivim.si/
11. Literature


