The Violent Implications of Opposition to the Istanbul Convention

Roggeband, C.; Krizsan, A.

DOI
10.3390/soc14060092

Publication date
2024

Document Version
Final published version

Published in
Societies

License
CC BY

societies

MDPI

Article

The Violent Implications of Opposition to the Istanbul Convention †

Conny Roggeband [1,*] and Andrea Krizsán [2]

[1] Department of Political Science, University of Amsterdam, 1018 WV Amsterdam, The Netherlands
[2] Department of Public Policy, Central European University, 1100 Vienna, Austria; krizsana@ceu.edu
* Correspondence: c.m.roggeband@uva.nl

† This article builds on research and conceptualization used in authors' book: Krizsán A., Roggeband C. Politicizing Gender and Democracy in the Context of the Istanbul Convention. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; 13 September 2021.

Abstract: This paper focuses on campaigns against the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). These campaigns not only obstructed ratification processes in a number of countries, but also that the openly hostile and highly gendered attacks had a direct impact on women's rights activists and their work, seriously hindering their work, but also affecting their well-being and safety. In this paper we explore the violent implications of the campaigns against the Istanbul Convention which are part of wider anti-gender campaigns. We argue that the violence of the campaigns and the violent implications should be considered gendered political violence, which effectively marginalizes women and other targeted groups and obstructs their participation in society and politics and as such is central to current autocratization tendencies and undermining of democracy.

Keywords: gender-based violence; women's rights organisations; democracy; Istanbul Convention; autocratization

Citation: Roggeband, C.; Krizsán, A. The Violent Implications of Opposition to the Istanbul Convention †. *Societies* **2024**, *14*, 92. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc14060092

Academic Editor: Lisa Jean Moore

Received: 6 March 2024
Revised: 5 June 2024
Accepted: 11 June 2024
Published: 17 June 2024

1. Introduction

Across Europe, strong radical right-wing campaigns and groups have emerged that oppose feminism and gender and sexual rights [1–3]. This broad and assertive pushback has led to a dismantling of gender equality rights and institutions in both young and more established democracies. Loose networks of conservative actors, including churches, think tanks, civil society organizations, political parties, and sometimes governments, mobilize in national and international arenas to attack reproductive rights, sexual freedom, and diversity [1,4,5]. One of the targets of these so-called anti-gender campaigns has been the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, better known as the Istanbul Convention (IC) [6–8].

The politics of the IC is a good arena to understand how attacks on gender equality contribute to gender-based violence at different levels and, through this, to the undermining of democracy. These attacks delegitimize the central goal of the Convention, eliminating violence against women and gender equality as a norm. Gender-based violence is fundamental to gender inequality. It curbs women's equal access to citizenship by limiting their bodily autonomy, liberty, and equal participation in all aspects of life [9]. As a result of these opposition campaigns, various countries in Central and Eastern Europe have refused to ratify the Convention (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania). Moreover, some countries that previously ratified the Convention withdrew, like Turkey. The Polish PIS government (2015–2023) also announced its plans to withdraw, even if it never did so. While all non-ratifiers can be characterized by strong opposition to gender equality, not all countries that had strong anti-gender campaigns failed to ratify. Research on patterns of ratification indicates the importance of gender equality norms and women's political empowerment in these countries but also the absence of long-lasting, unchallenged right-wing governments [10].

The campaigns against the Istanbul Convention not only obstructed the ratification but also altered relations between women's rights movements and states and redefined the context in which women's rights advocacy can be performed. The openly hostile and highly gendered attacks had a direct impact on women's rights activists and their work, seriously hindering their work but also affecting their well-being and safety. Civil society organisations and women's rights activists promoting the Istanbul Convention became the target of smear campaigns, but also threats and physical violence.

In this paper, we explore the violent implications of the campaigns against the Istanbul Convention, which are part of wider anti-gender campaigns. We start by briefly theorizing opposition to gender and sexual rights and its consequences. We next present our methods and data. We present our results in three sections: first, we discuss why and how the Istanbul Convention was targeted. Second, we examine the implications of these campaigns for organizations and activists working in the field. Third, we discuss the resilience and responses of feminist and other rights organizations under attack. We conclude by arguing that the violence of the campaigns and the violent implications should be considered gendered political violence, which effectively marginalizes women and other targeted groups and obstructs their participation in society and politics and, as such, is central to current autocratization tendencies and undermining of democracy.

2. Theorizing Opposition to Gender and Sexual Rights and Its Consequences

Opposition to gender and sexual rights is certainly not new and has long existed, but many observers point out it has mounted since the 2000s, driven by a heterogenous set of actors who mobilize against feminism and what they call "gender ideology" e.g., [1,3–5]. A report from the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights identifies a transnational network of like-minded religious conservatives and far-right actors whose funding comes from within Europe but also Russia and the United States [11].

These actors oppose a wide set of issues and try to overturn existing laws related to sexual and reproductive rights (e.g., LGBT rights, contraception, abortion, all assisted reproductive technologies), but also programs of sexual education in schools and gender studies at universities. While opponents initially focused their attention on blocking the advancement of gender equality and LGBT rights, their campaigns have become more proactive and seek to promote their own conservative agenda defending the 'natural order', traditional family models, and gender roles [4,12]. They use and co-opt human rights language, which they initially opposed, and became successful international lobbyists using litigation in international courts [13]. American and European campaigners have developed a strategic agenda with 'achievable goals' titled 'Restoring the Natural Order: an Agenda for Europe'; it seeks to overturn laws on basic human rights related to sexuality and reproduction [14]. Conservative and populist right-wing groups that oppose gender equality also captured state power in numerous countries and so gained influence in institutional politics and public policy making.

While anti-gender actors are not all religious actors, conservative organized religion does play a central role in many contexts. The Holy See is a key actor, orchestrating (transnational) opposition since the mid-1990s [4,12]. Consequently, much attention has focused on the role, motives, and frames of the Roman Catholic Church in mobilization against gender equality and sexual rights and less on other religious actors. However, by the late 2010s, the central role played by the Catholic Church was increasingly shared with other churches as well as various political actors [15]. Evangelical and Pentecostal churches are increasingly active in opposing the advancement of women's rights and activism against abortion in U.S. and Latin American anti-gender movements [16]. In Eastern Europe and Russia, Orthodox churches play an important role. At the international level, Catholic, Evangelical, Orthodox, and also Muslim actors form coalitions opposing progress on gender and sexual rights [4]. While anti-gender campaigns are typically driven by elite actors, support in the forms of protests, petitioning, or referendums, often building on church infrastructures, can lend popular support to campaigns [1].

Anti-gender campaigns are not without consequences. They result in policy backsliding, including blocked policy adoption or policy reframing, derailed implementation processes, and exclusionary patterns of policy consultation. Next to institutional changes, they also become key components of political and discursive opportunity structures influencing patterns, strategies, and discourses of feminist and pro-gender equality mobilizations by threatening them [17]. Research shows how, in countries with powerful anti-gender mobilizations, wider, more lively, better networked feminist coalitions are created, and women's resistance may be revitalized in such contexts [18,19]. At the same time, the context of increasing opposition to gender equality and women's rights also exposes activists to gendered political violence and generates fear and changes in strategies to mitigate risks [20,21]. Bardall, Bjarnegard, and Piscopo [22] (pp. 920–921) define gendered political violence as violence affecting political processes, intentional disruption of civic engagement, citizen mobilization, elections, and government. They also show that what makes political violence gendered is determined not just by gendered motivation but also by gendered form and gendered impact or the social perception of the violence. We argue that in the context of anti-gender campaigns, gendered political violence covers not just competitors in formal politics but may target all those who advocate for gender equality and represent women's rights, most specifically feminist civil society and women's rights advocates who are active in the field of combatting gender-based violence. Following definitions of the United Nations and European Union, gender-based violence includes not only physical and sexual violence but also psychologically abusive behaviours, such as controlling, coercion, economic violence, and intimidation, as well as hate speech and online violence. Along with Krook and Restrepo Sanín, we argue that such violence can have a powerful impact because it is not directed "solely towards one woman" but serves as a message towards the wider population of women and sexual minorities [23] (p. 136).

3. Data and Methods

This paper is based on a larger research work comparing contestations around the Istanbul Convention and their effects in four European countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, and Poland. Given our interest in the consequences of these debates, the four selected countries are among the ones that witnessed intensive anti-gender debates, all of them post-Communist countries. We choose countries that have different outcomes. Two of the selected countries ratified the Convention despite massive oppositional campaigns (Croatia and Poland), and two countries blocked the ratification (Bulgaria and Hungary). For this analysis, we used mixed qualitative research methods, combining process tracing with critical frame analysis [24]. In three of the four countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, and Hungary), opposition emerged only after the countries had signed the Convention, so we start our analysis from the moment of signing and trace developments until ratification or the decision to not ratify was taken. In Poland, contestation began already before signing, so we include these oppositional campaigns in our analysis. We analysed oppositional campaigns tracing actors challenging the Convention and the frames and strategies they mobilised. Next, we examined how women's rights groups responded to these attacks and the strategies they used to cope with opponents of the Istanbul Convention. Finally, we analysed the impact of contestation on legislation and policy (processes). Principally, we looked at how and why oppositional campaigns were successful in blocking ratification of the Convention but also assessed whether opposition to the Convention also led to changes in legislation and policies to combat gender-based violence or had implications for implementation processes and arrangements. Our causal analysis is at the macrolevel.

For our analysis, we made use of a qualitative database composed for an earlier project in which we analysed policies to combat gender-based violence in Central and Eastern Europe after the transition to democracy. Our data include 37 interviews that were conducted with women's rights activists and feminist policy makers active in the field from the four countries over a period 10 years. This database was complemented with new data specifically focused on the contention over the Istanbul Convention that was gathered by a group of country researchers knowing the local context and languages. These reports included 12 new interviews with feminist actors and an analysis of parliamentary debates, policy documents, and statements. We conceal the identity of the people interviewed for safety reasons. To analyse the perspectives of opponents of the Istanbul Convention, we mainly relied on documents, websites, reports, press statements, and interviews available from various media outlets. In addition, we examined newspaper articles, online platforms, and websites, as well as reports and publications issued by various international organizations and NGOs. We used critical frame analysis to understand how the different actors involved in the contention perceived (the problems with) the Istanbul Convention and what they proposed as preferred (government) solutions to deal with it. Critical frame analysis builds on the assumption that policy and political debates can be characterized by multiple interpretations of the same problems, and it seeks to address such implicit or explicit interpretations. Following Verloo, we define policy frames as an "organising principle that transforms fragmentary or incidental information into a structured and meaningful problem, in which a solution is implicitly or explicitly included" [24] (p. 20).

4. Results

4.1. Who Opposed the Istanbul Convention and Why?

Adopted in 2011, the Istanbul Convention is, today, the most comprehensive international treaty addressing gender-based violence against women. It defines gender-based violence in relation to gender equality and proposes coordinated intervention from a large number of actors, state and non-state, to acknowledge, combat, and prevent violence at the individual as well as structural levels. The Convention deals with a long-discussed and regulated issue, building on and systematizing extant policy solutions [6]. Gender-based violence is considered to be one of the most widely and successfully regulated gender policy fields, marked by the adoption of (inter)national legislation [25]. All European states have previously developed policies that were, to some extent, in line with the Convention before it was issued [6].

Initially, the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence appeared to be a success, with 34 ratifications by 2019. Yet, along with the wave of ratifications, opposition to the Istanbul Convention emerged both at the national level and EU level [7]. Opponents particularly criticized the Convention's explicit linkage between gender-based violence and structural gendered inequalities between women and men, the definition of gender in Article 3(c) as "the socially constructed roles, behavior, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men," and Arts. 12–16 that require states to "promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behavior of women and men "by means of education and other methods." [26]. The Convention, depicted as "gender-ideology" and a threat to traditional values and gender roles [6,27], became a core target of anti-gender campaigns in Europe. Debates about gender-related questions during the drafting process indicated forthcoming opposition [28], but the Convention nonetheless passed. Full-fledged attacks started in April 2012, as the signature process of the Convention started [6]. The Polish Minister of Justice Gowin was the first state official to question the legitimacy of the Convention, calling it an 'expression of feminist ideology' threatening traditional Polish values around the family and incompatible with the Polish constitution [29,30]. The Polish Conference of Bishops actively spoke out against signing the Convention [31,32]. A bit later, campaigns opposing the Convention emerged in other countries.

While the campaigns are diverse and are orchestrated and led by different organizations in each context, they centre around two central claims: (1) that the conception of gender in the Convention is problematic and (2) that the Convention would limit national sovereignty and threaten national values through the external imposition of gender, sexuality, and migration-related standards. Polish activists called the Convention "Ebola for

Poland from Brussels” [27], comparing the Istanbul Convention and its ‘gender ideology’ to a deathly disease threatening Poland and imposed on them by the European Union. This ‘mistake’ of linking the Convention to Brussels—the Convention comes from The Council of Europe based in Strasbourg—is telling as it serves to delegitimize Europe as such and presents it as a project threatening the Polish nation and its values.

The concept of gender in the IC was a central bone of contention to most opponents. For instance, the Hungarian think tank Emberi Méltóság Központ [33] called the Convention a Trojan Horse used by proponents of ‘gender ideology’ to smuggle their ideas into law, whereas the Center for Fundamental Rights think tank argued that the Convention “rules out the definition of biological sex and introduces genders instead” so that “nobody can be simply a man or woman anymore, and instead would belong to one of the endless artificially created gender categories” [34]. The Croatian Catholic organization Vigilare argued that the Convention seeks to introduce into the Croatian legislative framework the notion of gender, which does not exist [in Croatia] [. . .] and at the international legal level, the introduction of this category violates many constitutions and international laws, and thus human rights” [35]. Gender is seen as a dangerous concept, worse than “communism and nazism put together” as Polish activist claim [27], indoctrinating children and young people. Bulgaria’s Deputy Prime Minister, Krasimir Karakachnov, stated that “international lobbies are pushing Bulgaria to legalize a ‘third gender’ and introduce school programs for studying homosexuality and transvestism and creating opportunities for enforcing same-sex marriages” [36].

The IC is seen as violating national sovereignty. The Polish Bishops Conference argued that the Istanbul Convention would deprive Poland of its “sovereignty in the areas of morality and family” [37]. Another concern of opponents is that the Convention proposes to give migration status based on gender discrimination or violence. The Hungarian Prime Minister Orban argued in a parliamentary speech in November 2017 that this would facilitate migration and that, instead, the best that Hungary could do to protect women from violence was to stop migration [38]. The Hungarian Center for Fundamental Rights argued that “the Convention would open a very dangerous gate amidst the current migration crisis” [39]. Within this framework, women’s rights organizations are singled out and implicated in the foreign imposition of values. The Croatian organisation, In the Name of the Family, argues that ratifying the Convention imposes on the state the obligation to fund “ideological and political [women’s rights] struggles with public money” [40]. The Catholic organization Vigilare calls women’s rights organisations “‘holy cows’ of civil society” that are engaged in “illegal, morally unacceptable, socially destructive and other perfidious efforts at all (legal, scientific and parliamentary) levels” [35].

The campaigns were initiated and driven mainly by non-state actors like organized religion (the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Church); NGOs in Bulgaria, Croatia, and Poland (before the PiS party took office); and in other contexts like Hungary and Poland after the 2015 election’s ruling political parties and state actors took a leading role [6]. In line with their different institutional positions, their strategies varied. Civil society actors mostly used awareness campaigns, (social) media communication, and protests, but also petitions and referenda appealing to (majoritarian) democracy ideals [41]. The Croatian organisation, ‘Truth about the Istanbul Convention’, unsuccessfully proposed a referendum prior to parliamentary voting on ratification [42]. The Polish Ordo Iuris Institute launched the first in a series of at least seven petitions on the topic on the Citizengo platform: ‘Protest against the ideological convention! Stop “Gender mission”!’ [43]. In Bulgaria, the Society and Value Association (SVA) initiated an online petition against ratification in September 2017 [44]. Appeals to the constitution, arguing that the IC was not in line with national constitutions, were made in various countries. An appeal to the Constitutional Court was successfully used in Bulgaria to block ratification. The Court decision—heavily informed by reports drafted by conservative experts and think tanks—declared the IC as unconstitutional, rending any substantial debate in parliament futile. The Bulgarian government, at that moment holding the presidency of the EU, argued that the decision of the Constitutional

Court was beyond their control. In other countries like Croatia, Poland, and Hungary, legal arguments and procedures also played a central role in the campaigns. The Polish Ordo Iuris, for instance, produced a detailed analysis of the Istanbul Convention that provided legal grounds to oppose the Convention [45]. The same institute also developed an alternative Convention on the Rights of the Family [46].

In countries where populist right-wing parties were governing, in particular Hungary and Poland, the opposition was led by governments that appointed prominent opponents of the IC in key political positions. For instance, several lead members of the conservative Catholic think tank Ordo Iuris in Poland became Ministers and Secretaries of State under PIS governments, and Ordo Iuris also delegated one of its funding members to become the spokesperson of the Polish Supreme Court [47].

Campaigns against the Istanbul Convention are, thus, led and orchestrated by a heterogeneous set of actors, including some very new civil society groups. The core message they communicate is that the IC is a 'Trojan Horse', an international convention that, under the guise of improving policies to combat violence against women, aims to attack and destroy national 'traditional' values and impose 'foreign' liberal agendas.

4.2. The Implications for Feminist Actors Working in the Field of VAW

In addition to the political strategies discussed in the previous section, in this section, we show that actors defending the IC were also attacked and intimidated. Women's rights organizations received hate speech and threats on (social) media and became the centre of smear campaigns. On some occasions, activists and their offices were also physically attacked. In Bulgaria and Croatia, this violence mainly came from non-state actors, but police failed to protect these activists. In Hungary and Poland (after 2015), state actors were also attacking women's rights organizations. In these countries, right-wing populist governments launched campaigns against 'critical' civil society actors, mostly progressive and human rights organisations, and took measures to obstruct their functioning. They directly targeted advocates of the IC and instead supported IC opponents either by providing them with resources or including them in the decision making over the ratification [6].

The Polish PiS government (2015–2023) targeted women's rights activists and organizations through raids, denial of funding, and legal harassment [21]. In Poland, after the Black protests in 2017, the police searched a number of NGO offices, including the Women's Rights Center (in Warsaw, Gdańsk, and Łódź) and the office of BABA in Zielona Góra on 4 October 2017 [21] (p. 50). The WRC Warsaw director Ursula Nowakowska described the impact of this attack:

> "[A policeman] said it would be better if I stop giving interviews or making comments in the media" [. . .] "Of course, I felt very insecure, intimidated. [. . .] After they returned the [computer] disks, I was afraid. I was also afraid to use the telephone.. . . I feel paranoid. Sometimes I prefer to talk somewhere else [outside the office]. Sometimes I'm suspicious of volunteers or people who come—even one of our staff members who used to work at [a government] office" [21] (pp. 52–53)

In Hungary, media outlets linked to the government published the names of women's rights activists. In addition, they were also targeted by smear campaigns and excessive monitoring coming from governmental actors. Activists feared the return of some of the tactics used under the communist regime, like phone tapping or the monitoring of personal finances (Interview with Hungarian activist 4).

The harassment in Hungary and Poland not only affected the activists who were directly targeted but also provoked fear among other women's rights activists. As Feminoteka representative Joanna Piotrowska told Human Rights Watch, "I think that what happened with BABA and Autonomia was to incite fear in other organizations. I am sure that was one of the goals" [21] (p. 54). Another protester echoed the sense of intimidation, stating she "felt the breath of the government on my back [during Black Protest preparations]. The climate of our whole country is such that, if you do something against [those in] power, [those in] power will destroy you" (ibid). Also, in Bulgaria, activists reported instances of harassment and smear campaigns. The Open Door Centre based in Pleven, Bulgaria, wrote in a CEDAW shadow report that "Right-wing parties, the Orthodox Church and some organizations are currently manipulating society by instilling fear and hatred of non-governmental organizations that assist women and children affected by violence. NGOs have been portrayed as a form of evil that is funded by outside forces seeking to destroy Bulgarian society. The Bulgarian government does not take any measures to protect NGOs from these manipulations and attacks." This makes "the situation in Bulgaria uncertain and very worrying, both for women victims of domestic violence and for non-governmental organizations, which are still the only ones providing assistance to these women" [48].

The attacks also affect the (potential) clients of the services that are offered by women's rights organizations in situations of violence. The Director of Warsaw Women's Rights Center, Nowakowska, explained how the police raids were witnessed by some clients: "It was very frightening for clients. [. . .] I think some clients think of us differently [since the raids]" [21] (p. 53). Anna Głogowska-Balcerzak, from the Women's Rights Center in Lódź, reported that "[a victim] said she wanted to come sooner, but she saw [the news] about the police raid and she was afraid," (ibid) Joanna Piotrowska, of *Feminoteka* in Warsaw stated, "If there were random controls [of our activities] or different people have access to the database [of client information]—women might start doubting us and not come" (ibid:54).

In addition to these physical attacks, the services that women's rights organizations provide to those who suffer from violence are also endangered by other measures, such as legal harassment and budget cuts. In Poland, blocked access to funding implied that some centres could no longer pay the salaries of lawyers and psychologists, forcing them to reduce or discontinue some of their services. In 2019, the Women's Rights Center in Warsaw reported they had to drastically cut two-thirds of their services [21] (p. 45). According to the Center's director, this resulted in longer waiting lists, discouraging some women from obtaining help: "A woman will call, and we'll offer her an appointment to come in two weeks.. . . She'll say, 'But I have made the decision [to get help] today.' Sometimes we lose them" (ibid). In Bulgaria, some women's rights organizations noted how the campaigns against the Istanbul Convention and the growing opposition against "gender-ideology" also led to decreased funding of their services. A representative of an organisation in Sofia noted how this had put the continuation of the services at risk:

> "We have seven to eight organizations (. . .) and we are trying to do something [to combat VAW] (. . .) on a voluntary basis. So, if you ask me, the feminist movement in Bulgaria is in crisis at the moment. The crisis is because of this tendency of not being recognized as a part of civil society. But also because of the scarce funding. We cannot survive anymore." (interview with Bulgarian activist 2, 20 January 2020)

While in Hungary, women's rights organisations never had a strong relationship with state actors, access and cooperation became very complicated after FIDESZ took office in 2010. Women's rights activists reported that their organisations were put on blacklists which blocked cooperation with various VAW stakeholders (Interview with Hungarian activist 2, March 2020). Women's rights NGOs were no longer consulted about or involved in the execution of policies to combat violence under the FIDESZ government [49]. Also, cooperations with law enforcement agencies were discontinued. For instance, in 2018, the police headquarters discontinued their partnership with the women's rights organization NANE in an EU project proposal addressing the European Protection Order. As a longtime activist recounted:

> "We had a project with the Police and Vodafone; it was about an alarm device for the use in violence cases. The Police had shut it down from one day to another without any justification or communication. It was clear that they were told from higher up in the hierarchy not to cooperate with us longer [. . .] After 2010: human rights organizations were banned outright from any cooperation with state institutions, like trainings. Not only NANE but Helsinki, TASZ, those who

> previously had provided judge trainings (had access to Office of the National Council of Justice). These organizations were banned explicitly. This affects our daily operations because the only sphere we could reach with our accreditation is the social sphere (and education). They also try to harden the process of accreditations, imposing restrictions on civil organization" (Interview with Hungarian activist 3, 1 March 2018)

Another cooperation that was affected was between the OKIT (National Crisis Intervention and Telephone Service) and women's rights organisations working in the field of violence against women. In 2017, OKIT refused to give the NANE Association an updated list of state-run crises when organizing a conference (in cooperation with the Women Against Violence Europe Network) for organizations working on VAW.

Access to project-based state funding was also blocked after 2010. The FIDESZ government started to introduce changes in its funding mechanisms for civil society through a number of legal amendments, which resulted in new tendering procedures. As a result, state support went mostly to NGOs that have close connections to the government or whose objectives are aligned with government priorities. Since then, conservative organizations promoting the role of women in the family and nation have been the main recipients of state funding [6]. In March 2017, the State Secretary for Family and Population Policy announced that a new organization called Family Friendly Country non-profit Ltd., a new organization with no previous experience in the field of violence, received European Social Fund money designated to combat domestic violence. In 2017, Hungary passed the Lex NGO, Law on the 'Transparency of Organisations Supported from Abroad' that introduced restrictions on Hungarian NGOs stigmatizing them for receiving funding outside of Hungary, effectively obstructing the main funding channel for women's rights organisations. This also led to a stigmatization of women's rights organizations as "foreign agents" and, as such, "enemies of the state".

Somewhat similar developments are visible in Poland after the PiS party took office in 2015. Women's rights organizations that were previously involved in the implementation and execution of policies to combat violence against women were sidelined and lost their previous standing in policy making processes. The PiS government reorganized funding mechanisms for civil society and redirected state funding to conservative civil society organisations aligned with their agenda. In October 2017, the National Freedom Institute—Centre for the Development of Civil Society—was created to distribute state funding among NGOs. The law that established the new Institute not only referred to Catholic values but also lacked any safeguards to ensure its independence from the government (Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, 2017). Various women's rights organizations lost state funding. After the Black Protest in 2016, the Ministry of Justice discontinued its cooperation with organisations providing specialized support for women victims of domestic violence that had promoted the protests. This affected the Women's Rights Centres in Lódź and Warsaw, the BABA Lubuskie Center for Women's Rights, and the Autonomia Foundation in Krakow. They were replaced by organizations with profiles closer to government agendas and values [21,50]. New, 'alternative' services—not in compliance with the IC aims and principles—have been set up by the state or religious organizations. This hampered access to services run by women's organizations, as state agencies refer people affected by violence to the new state-sponsored services. As a result of this, the Commissioner for Human Rights observed that "in recent years several local (municipality and district) support centres have been closed down (in 2015, there were 24 such centres, in 2016 and in 2017, respectively 22 and 20)" and that the number of services is now inadequate [51] (p. 38). It remains to be seen what direction the new democratic government incoming in 2024 will take in this field.

Also, in Croatia, although to a lesser extent than in Bulgaria, Hungary, or Poland, the position of women's rights organizations changed as opposition to gender equality increased. Starting from 2011 onwards, relations between women's rights groups and consecutive governments gradually deteriorated. The active cooperation between state and feminist civil society organizations and the involvement of women's organizations in the implementation and execution of VAW policies has changed over the past decade. One activist explains as follows:

> "Ten to twelve years ago, it was much better, the institutions accepted us as partners, they were learning from us, they were accepting suggestions and implementing them into documents and laws, which made the situation much better" (Interview with Croatian activist 2, 9 January 2018)

Women's rights organizations that had been collaborating with state agencies for years providing shelters and legal and psychological services were substituted by other, new organizations without expertise or previous experience and sidelined in policy making:

> "The government has seen who they can work with and who they cannot. Organizations that have existed for years, who understand the issue, are no longer included in policy making. Instead, policy makers and state actors are increasingly collaborating with groups that are unexperienced and have little knowledge about the problem" (Interview with Croatian activist 1, 8 December 2019)

The preceding findings clarify that the opposition to the Istanbul Convention had important implications. Our interviews with civil society activists, as well as some NGO reporting, indicate the sometimes violent nature of the campaigns, including hate speech, but also harassment, intimidation, and material and physical violence, which directly affected the work and lives of activists and functioning of their organisations and services. In cases where government and state actors are part of oppositional campaigns, it also had more severe consequences. The loss of both state and foreign funding put many women's rights in a very vulnerable position in which they were struggling to sustain their service work for survivors of violence. It also hampered their capacity to mobilize in defence of the Istanbul Convention and against the hostilities of state and non-state actors.

4.3. Women's Organizations' Responses: Re-Strategizing and Resilience

The desire to protect and sustain their services for survivors of violence makes many women's rights organizations opt for a prudent and less confrontational style in relation to state agencies. They try to avoid further polarization and depoliticize the debates around the Istanbul Convention and VAW policies. Bulgarian activists discussed how to get their organizations out of the firing line after the attacks and continued smear campaigns against them. Interviews with activists revealed that some organizations considered deleting the word 'gender' from their names. The Gender Alternatives Foundation decided against the name change after debates in a staff meeting: "we decided we are not going to change the name simply because that will be a victory for our opponents" (Interview with Bulgarian activist 1, 28 January 2020). Nevertheless, they cautiously use the abbreviation of their organization's name:

> "So every time we are going to a new place, new institution, new organization, we are a bit more cautious than usually, we present the organization not with the full name, but the abbreviation. (. . .) schools became very suspicious, their directors, and not very friendly about the word gender (. . .) we have to be very careful to gain first the trust of the school, of the director" (ibid.)

Interviews also indicate how, after the anti-IC campaign, Bulgarian organizations tried to retreat from the conflict:

> "(. . .) this anti-propaganda appeared, and the state made a clear choice to comply with the preferences of the smaller partner in the government coalition, then we didn't have much to do further. (. . .) we had done our mission to the extent we could do it as an NGO. Further on, we couldn't complete what the state was supposed to do. . . Of course, no one could be expected to risk her life or health for (. . .) the Convention, because there were real risks, indeed" (Interview with Bulgarian activist 2, 14 January 2020)

Somewhat similarly, Polish organizations opted to prioritize their service work over trying to confront and defy the government's plans to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention. A Polish activist observes that in Poland

> "(...) women's groups that deal with domestic violence [and] that provide advice and so on and run centers in smaller cities, and even in Warsaw [...] don't want this issue to become political. Rather than clashing with the PiS government, they prefer to have the connections to the ministries, to get some funding (...) I think this is a wider shared view that if there is an open fight it might be detrimental to the victim of violence (...). That's how it is that they can help victims more by being quiet and not entering into the political fight, then being together with let's say the Civic Platform or the Social Democratic Party and attacking the government and actually (...) getting nothing in return. They have learned from previous experiences that if they were trying to build coalitions with political parties, they were used and didn't get anything in return. And actually, they think that not having the fight is better for the victims" (Interview with Polish activist 1, 21 January 2020)

VAW activist Anna Glogowska-Balcerzak from the Women's Rights Center in Lódź explains the following: "when we have women waiting in the corridors [of the center], we will work [there]," and "it [going to court to appeal the government's plan to withdraw from the Convention] probably wouldn't be useful anyhow" [21] (p. 43). So rather than spending their energies on protesting against government plans, many women's organisations prefer to avoid further polarization in order to protect and sustain their service work.

In Hungary, women's rights organizations tried to keep their fragile relationship with state actors as open as possible. Activists soon realized that the government would probably not ratify the Istanbul Convention and instead tried to find other ways of improving policies and services. One activist explained that they tried to push the government after it had stated that Hungary could have strong policies to combat violence against women without the Istanbul Convention (Hungarian activist 3, March 2020). As one movement actor discusses

> "After the attacks on the Convention started and the government spelled out its opposition, a question was raised among movement actors whether the strong demand of the ratification is still feasible and effective, or it would be more efficient to focus on the necessary steps taken to address the issue of violence against women/domestic violence. This question became particularly relevant in the context of addressing the government, or our relationship with various state actors. It was a relevant question for example when after the domestic violence murder in Gyor the Minister of Justice initiated a process to address domestic violence and women's rights NGOs were involved in the process and could provide input. No strategic decision has been made on the issue. The Convention remained an advocacy demand of the NGOs for now. At the same time, the Convention is also used indirectly to address substantive policy issues and demand legislative and policy changes." (Interview with Hungarian activist 3, March 2020)

In Croatia, women's rights activists handled counter-mobilization relatively successfully, but it also led to fierce discussions among activists about how to deal with the growing opposition. Whereas some of the more established service organizations noted exhaustion and preferred to focus on service provision, younger activists insisted on developing proactive campaigns. One activist noted the following:

> "The old ones may be tired, but given the attacks we are experiencing, we are responding, but these new activists want to go proactive, not responding. They should work in parallel, both reactive and proactive where possible" (Interview Croatian activist 1, 13 December 2019)

Indeed, the polarization around the Istanbul Convention resulted in a wave of feminist reactive and proactive campaigns and the creation of new feminist organizations like fAKTIV in Croatia. A coalition of groups, including the Autonomous Women's House Zagreb, Womens' Network Croatia, Domine Split, and Lesbian Group Kontra, staged the very visible Handmaiden protests inspired by Atwood's dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* in different cities across Croatia. These also continued after the ratification. As protesters argued

> "We are here to remind the Government of the implementation of the Convention, which was ratified on 13 April. Since then, three women have been killed and the last case happened last night. We act here as maids to remind us of the urgent need for the implementation of the Convention, because while we are standing here women are dying. . ..." [52]

Polish activists also fiercely responded to oppositional campaigns, and their protest intensified after the PiS party won the elections in 2015. Although the government cut funding and activists were harassed and excluded, feminists managed to revitalize and intensify their activism by relying on innovative forms of protest, finding alternative channels of funding, and establishing new coalitions [53]. In Bulgaria, an activist noted the following:

> "the intensity of the actions and contacts of the NGOs as well as the level of activities increased during the campaign. (. . .) it was much more intense during the situation with the Istanbul Convention, all these meetings and mailings and special petitions. The Bulgarian Platform was sending a petition to the government asking for developing legislation. This petition has been signed by all the other non-governmental feminist organizations. Also, we participated in street protests." (Interview with Bulgarian activist 3, 20 January 2020)

Even in Hungary, where activists had been dealing with state closure and hostilities since 2010, and the situation became gradually more grim, women's rights organisations intensified their activism and responded with disruptive and confrontational campaigns. They staged various street protests and initiated a petition to pressure the government to ratify the Convention on 31 March 2016 (Országos Peticiok.com 2016). Support for the IC became a topic for major pro-democracy protests and also for oppositional coalitions supporting democracy [6].

In response to the emergence of anti-gender campaigns and increased hostilities towards them by both non-state and state actors, women's rights organisations in all four countries strengthened activism and worked towards more concerted and unified activism. New intersectional coalitions were built between organizations working on different issues and sometimes diverging agendas and perspectives. In Croatia, broad, intergenerational coalitions emerged to support the Convention, but this feminist activism was also supported by actors that were not previously involved in the debate, like medical doctors and nurses, artists and celebrities, parent associations, and human rights organizations [54]. In Poland, the massive protests and activism that were staged under the PiS government also managed to mobilize new constituencies and create broad coalitions. A Polish activist stated, in 2018, the following:

> "There's more and more of those kinds of coalitions. We are networking and joining forces. It's an excellent idea to include those persons who got engaged in the Black Protests and the All-Poland Women's Strike into our joint coalition. There are many ad hoc coalitions being formed. [. . .] It was our priority to avoid making anti-violence actions only in Warsaw, but for it to rather spread locally, because anti-violence activities are realized locally" (Activist quoted in Szczygielska, 2019:145–146)

Likewise, in Bulgaria, women's rights organisations managed to engage a wide range of other civil society organisations but also state actors in their efforts to promote the

Istanbul Convention. The Minister of Justice, Tsetska Tsacheva, expressed her support during a public hearing in January 2018, and the Ombudsperson became another important actor in favour of the Convention (Interview with Bulgarian activist 3, 20 January 2020). Political actors, including high-level state officials, were also strong supporters of the ISign campaign staged by women's rights organizations in Croatia. The petition was signed by President Josipovic on 31 July 2014. Prime Minister Plenkovic supported the Convention and repeatedly expressed that the politicization of the Convention by anti-gender actors was inappropriate [55].

Many activists expressed, during the interviews, that the oppositional campaigns to the Istanbul Convention led to polarization but also reinforced gender equality as a central value of democracy, which helped to create broad support. As an activist from the Polish Women's Rights Center explained

> "(. . .) after our problems and harassment of the government, we have much more individuals, who are supporting us. And I really think it is a good way to go, because we could be more independent and build a constituency who understands and shares our values. We will make our whole movement bigger. We are not just a women's organization, but we have a whole group of other people who support us, who share our values. For me this is very important" [56]

So the struggles over the Istanbul Convention also reinvigorated activism and helped to create broad alliances between women's rights organisations, other human rights organisations, and defenders of democracy.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Our findings indicate that the fierce oppositional campaigns to the Istanbul Convention not only successfully blocked ratification in Bulgaria and Hungary but also affected women's rights organizations and existing policies and services in the four countries we included in our analysis. Whereas in some of the countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, and Poland), women's organizations had previously partnered with the state to combat violence against women, the attacks—that in some countries were led or even orchestrated by governments and state actors—forced them to change their strategies and cope with the hostilities towards them. State actors sponsored or condoned violence against women's rights organizations and defenders of the Convention using both extralegal measures like harassment, smear campaigns, and intimidation but also legal measures limiting access, resources, or space for maneuver to obstruct their functioning. These mounted to gendered political violence restricting the space of civil society actors.

Feminist infrastructures to attend to the survivors of violence, such as shelters and legal and psychological services, were dismantled and defunded either by complete removal or by replacement with alternative services operated by conservative organizations opposing the Convention. This often implied services were geared towards protecting families rather than individual victims of violence. This shift was accompanied by a reframing of the problem, denying its link to gender inequality and instead conveniently relating violence to 'deviant' groups or particular social categories. In such alternative frames, violence is culturalized or pathologized, suggesting it is a problem mainly connected to migration, poverty, and alcohol or drug abuse, thus denying its structural gendered character. It externalizes the problem away from the idealized traditional family that is presented as a safe haven or protection against violence. By shifting public debates and political positions against feminist organizations and gender equality, anti-gender actors fuelled a context in which street-level professionals are encouraged to disrespect victim protection principles even if those are set in policies. As Hawkesworth [57] points out, the failure to investigate, prosecute, and punish gender-based violence exacerbates rather than mitigates violence and puts women and sexual minorities beyond the protection of the law and the state.

While violence against feminist civil society and curtailing their rights is pervasive, these organizations managed to continue—and one could say even reinvigorate—their activism and service work in the hostile environment. Opposition against the Istanbul

Convention and the attacks on gender and sexual rights brought older and newer feminist generations together who launched highly visible campaigns and widely attended protests, which attracted new allies. They managed to connect the Istanbul Convention and gender-based violence to the pro-democracy and mainstream human rights agenda, thus mobilizing the support of a wider audience. This contributes to a long-term gendering of democracy in these countries but is visible in the short term as well: mobilizing against and defeating the PiS party in the recent Polish elections can be directly related to the mobilization of women against the ongoing attacks on their rights.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, C.R and A.K.; formal analysis, C.R. And A.K. writing—original draft preparation, C.R. And A.K.; writing—review and editing, C.R. and A.K.; funding acquisition, C.R and A.K. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: Funding for this research was granted by the Amsterdam Center for European Studies, University of Amsterdam, and the Central European University Research Support Scheme: no grant number.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data collected from public media is accessible in the articles references. The interview data is not not readily available due to ethical and safety considerations.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. Kuhar, R.; Paternotte, D. (Eds.) *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*; Rowman & Littlefield: Lanham, MD, USA, 2017.
2. Verloo, M. (Ed.) *Varieties of Opposition to Gender Equality in Europe*; Routledge: Abingdon, UK, 2018.
3. Graff, A.; Korolczuk, E. *Anti-Gender Politics in the Populist Moment*; Taylor & Francis: Abingdon, UK, 2022.
4. Chappell, L. Contesting women's rights: Charting the emergence of a transnational conservative counter-network. *Glob. Soc.* **2006**, *20*, 491–520. [CrossRef]
5. Graff, A.; Kapur, R.; Walters, S.D. Introduction: Gender and the Rise of the Global Right. *J. Women Cult. Soc.* **2019**, *44*, 541–560. [CrossRef]
6. Krizsán, A.; Roggeband, C. *Politicizing Gender and Democracy in the Context of the Istanbul Convention*; Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, UK, 2021.
7. Berthet, V. Norm under fire: Support for and opposition to the European Union's ratification of the Istanbul Convention in the European Parliament. *Int. Fem. J. Politics* **2022**, *24*, 675–698. [CrossRef]
8. De Silva, M.; Tepliakova, M. Populist Challenge? Negotiating the EU's Accession to the Istanbul Convention in the Council. *Politics Gov.* **2024**, *12*, 8110. [CrossRef]
9. Franzway, S.; Moulding, N.; Wendt, S.; Zufferey, C.; Chung, D. Problems of citizenship, violence and gender. In *The Sexual Politics of Gendered Violence and Women's Citizenship*; Policy Press: Bristol, UK, 2018; pp. 11–32.
10. Krizsán, A.; Roggeband, C.; Zeller, M.C. Who is afraid of the Istanbul Convention? Explaining opposition and support to gender equality. *Comp. Political Stud.* 2024; *under review*.
11. Datta, N. Tip of the Iceberg: Religious Extremist Funders against Human Rights for Sexuality and Reproductive Health in Europe 2009–2018, European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (EPF). 2021. Available online: https://www.epfweb.org/node/837 (accessed on 16 February 2024).
12. Goetz, A.M. The New Competition in Multilateral Norm-Setting: Transnational Feminists & the Illiberal Backlash. *Daedalus* **2020**, *149*, 160–179. [CrossRef]
13. Yamin, A.E.; Datta, N.; Andión, X. Behind the drama: The roles of transnational actors in legal mobilization over sexual and reproductive rights. *Geo. J. Gend. L.* **2017**, *19*, 533.
14. Datta, N. Restoring the Natural Order: The religious extremists' Vision to Mobilize European Societies against Human Rights on Sexuality and Reproduction. Brussels: European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (EPF). 2018. Available online: https://www.epfweb.org/node/690 (accessed on 16 February 2024).
15. Paternotte, D. Victor Frankenstein and his creature: The many lives of 'gender ideology'. *Int. Rev. Sociol.* **2023**, *33*, 80–104. [CrossRef]
16. Vaggione, J.M.; Machado, M.D.D.C. Religious patterns of neoconservatism in Latin America. *Politics Gend.* **2020**, *16*, E2. [CrossRef]
17. Almeida, P.D. Social movement partyism: Collective action and political parties. In *Strategic Alliances: New Studies of Social Movement Coalitions*; Van Dyke, N., McCammon, H., Eds.; University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN, USA, 2010; pp. 170–196.
18. Korolczuk, E. Explaining "black protests" against abortion ban in Poland: The power of connective action. *Zoon Politicon* **2016**, *7*, 91–113.

19. Berry, M.; Chenoweth, E. Who made the women's march? In *The Resistance: The Dawn of the Anti-Trump Opposition Movement*; Meyer, D., Tarrow, S., Eds.; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2018; pp. 75–89.
20. Bishop, K. *Standing Firm: Women- and Trans-Led Organisations Respond to Closing Space for Civil Society*; Mama Cash: Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Urgent Action Fund: Alameda, CA, USA, 2017.
21. HRW (Human Rights Watch). The Breath of the Government on my Back. Attacks on Women's Rights in Poland. 2019. Available online: https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/02/06/breath-government-my-back/attacks-womens-rights-poland (accessed on 16 February 2024).
22. Bardall, G.; Bjarnegård, E.; Piscopo, J.M. How is political violence gendered? Disentangling motives, forms, and impacts. *Political Stud.* **2020**, *68*, 916–935.
23. Krook, M.L.; Restrepo Sanín, J. Gender and political violence in Latin America. Concepts, debates and solutions. *Polit. Gob.* **2016**, *23*, 127–162.
24. Verloo, M. Reflections on the Concept and Practice of the Council of Europe Approach to Gender Mainstreaming. *Soc. Politics* **2005**, *12*, 344–365. [CrossRef]
25. Htun, M.; Weldon, S.L. The civic origins of progressive policy change: Combating violence against women in global perspective, 1975–2005. *Am. Political Sci. Rev.* **2012**, *106*, 548–569. [CrossRef]
26. Council of Europe. Text of the Istanbul Convention. Available online: https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/text-of-the-convention (accessed on 16 February 2024).
27. Graff, A.; Korolczuk, E. Worse Than Communism and Nazism Put Together: War on Gender in Poland. In *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*; Kuhar, R., Paternotte, D., Eds.; Rowman & Littlefield: Lanham, MD, USA, 2017.
28. Acar, F.; Popa, R.M. From Feminist Legal Project to Groundbreaking Regional Treaty: The Making of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. *Eur. J. Hum. Rights* **2016**, *3*, 287–319.
29. Gaweda, B. No Country for Losers? Gender, (In)Equality, and the Discursive Construction of Subjects and Values in Polish Politics. Ph.D. Thesis, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK, 2017.
30. Onet. Gowin: Krytycznie Oceniam Konwencję RE o Przemocy Wobec Kobiet. [Gowin: I Am Critical of the CoE Convention on Violence against Women]. 2012. Available online: https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/gowin-krytycznie-oceniam-konwencje-re-o-przemocy-wobec-kobiet/kb25j (accessed on 16 February 2024).
31. Konferencja Episkopatu Polski. Oświadczenie Prezydium Konferencji Episkopatu Polski. [Statement of the Presidium of the Polish Bishops' Conference]. 2012. Available online: https://episkopat.pl/oswiadczenie-prezydium-konferencji-episkopatu-polski-3/ (accessed on 16 February 2024).
32. Konferencja Episkopatu Polski. Przypomnienie Stanowiska Episkopatu ws. Konwencji Rady Europy. [Reminder of the Position of the Episcopate on the Convention of the Council of Europe]. 2014. Available online: https://episkopat.pl/przypomnienie-stanowiska-episkopatu-ws-konwencji-rady-europy/ (accessed on 16 February 2024).
33. Emberi Méltóság Központ. Az Isztambuli Egyezmény Ratifikálása a Gender Ideológia Trójai Falovát Jelentheti Magyarország Számára [Ratification of the Istanbul Convention Could Be a Trojan Horse for Gender Ideology in Hungary]. 2017. Available online: https://mltsg.files.wordpress.com/2019/09/isztambuli-egyezmc3a9ny-c381llc3a1sfoglalc3a1s_emberi-mc3a9ltc3b3sc3a1g-kc3b6zpont.pdf (accessed on 16 February 2024).
34. Alapjogokért Központ. Nem a Gender Egyezményre [No to the Gender Convention]. 2017. Available online: https://alapjogokert.hu/2017/05/16/nem-a-genderegyezmenyre-2/ (accessed on 16 February 2024).
35. Vigilare. Stajalište Vigilare o "Istanbulskoj konvenciji". [Vigilare's Position on the "Istanbul Convention"]. 2017. Available online: https://vigilare.org/priopcenje/stajaliste-vigilare-istanbulskoj-konvenciji/ (accessed on 16 February 2024).
36. Cheresheva, M. Convention on Gender Violence Draws Backlash in Bulgaria. Bulgaria Insight. 2018. Available online: https://balkaninsight.com/2018/01/04/convention-on-violence-against-women-faces-backlash-in-bulgaria-01-04-2018/ (accessed on 16 February 2024).
37. Konferencja Episkopatu Polski. Mamy Czas do 3 Marca! [We Have until March 3!]. 2015. Available online: https://episkopat.pl/mamy-czas-do-3-marca/ (accessed on 16 February 2024).
38. Magyar Nemzet. Migránsozással Válaszolt Orbán Viktor a Nők Elleni Erőszak Felvetésére. [Viktor Orban Talked about Migrants when He Was Asked about Violence against Women]. 2017. Available online: https://magyarnemzet.hu/archivum/belfold-archivum/migransozassal-valaszolt-orban-viktor-a-nok-elleni-eroszak-felvetesere-3872379/ (accessed on 16 February 2024).
39. Alapjogokért Központ. A Választások Után se Kerülhet Szóba a Gender-Egyezmény Elfogadása [Even after the Elections, There Can Be no Question of Adopting a Gender Convention]. 2018. Available online: https://alapjogokert.hu/2018/01/18/a-valasztasok-utan-sem-kerulhet-szoba-a-gender-egyezmeny-elfogadasa/ (accessed on 16 February 2024).
40. Jutarnji List. OKUPLJANJE PROTIV ISTANBULSKE KONVENCIJE: Prosvjednici Uputili Oštru Kritiku Premijeru, Klicali: 'Odlazi Plenkoviću' i 'Ovo je Izdaja' [GATHERING AGAINST ISTANBUL CONVENTION: Protesters Sharply Criticize Prime Ministers, Calling 'Leave Plenkovic' and 'This Is Treason'. 2018. Available online: https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/zagreb/foto-video-okupljanje-protiv-istanbulske-konvencije-prosvjednici-uputili-ostru-kritiku-premijeru-klicali-odlazi-plenkovicu-i-ovo-je-izdaja-7166310 (accessed on 16 February 2024).
41. Biard, B. The influence of radical right populist parties on law and order policy-making. *Policy Stud.* **2019**, *40*, 40–57. [CrossRef]
42. Istina o Istanbulskoj. Open Letter to Croatian President on Opening a Referendum on the Ratification of the Istanbul Convention. 2018. Available online: http://istinaoistanbulskoj.info/download/otvoreno_pismo.pdf (accessed on 16 February 2024).

43. Citizengo Poland. Zaprotestuj Przeciwko Ideologicznej Konwencji! Zatrzymaj „Gendermisję"! [Protest against the Ideological Convention! Stop "Gender Mission"!]. 2014. Available online: https://citizengo.org/pl/3884-konwencji-rady-europy-w-sprawie-zapobiegania-i-zwalczania-przemocy-wobec-kobiet-i-przemocy (accessed on 16 February 2024).
44. Family News. Interview with Mihaela Djorgova, Bulgaria: How Bulgarians Managed Get Mobilized to Reject the Istanbul Convention. 2018. Available online: https://familynews.ro/interview-with-mihaela-djorgova-bulgaria-how-bulgarians-managed-get-mobilized-to-reject-the-istanbul-convention/ (accessed on 16 February 2024).
45. Ordo Iuris. Analiza Projektu Ustawy o Ratyfikacji Konwencji Rady Europy o Zapobieganiu i Przeciwdziałaniu Przemocy Wobec Kobiet i Przemocy Domowej. [Analysis of the Draft Law on the Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Counteracting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence]. 2016. Available online: https://ordoiuris.pl/rodzina-i-malzenstwo/analiza-projektu-ustawy-o-ratyfikacji-konwencji-rady-europy-o-zapobieganiu-i (accessed on 16 February 2024).
46. Ordo Iuris. Convention on the Rights of the Family. 2018. Available online: https://ordoiuris.pl/sites/default/files/inline-files/Convention_on_the_rights_of_the_family.pdf (accessed on 16 February 2024).
47. Ciobanu, C. Ordo Iuris: The Ultra Conservative Organisation Transforming Poland. Balkan Insight. 2021. Available online: https://balkaninsight.com/2021/06/22/ordo-iuris-the-ultra-conservative-organisation-transforming-poland/ (accessed on 16 February 2024).
48. Open Door Centre Foundation. Shadow Report before the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on the Report of Bulgaria and the Answers to Written Questions to the State of Bulgaria regarding the Eighth Periodic Review of Bulgaria on the Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). 2019. Available online: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/DownloadDraft.aspx?key=eKDeBuzbINEwlc+N9ONI/QDKQIZpJWRKhNHk5NorjupM/z+bVD5g2hgnWqtbJAt/6ohAY5tRvW2eFAxwKLrs2w== (accessed on 16 February 2024).
49. Juhász, B.; Pap, E. Backlash in Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Rights. European Parliament. 2018. Available online: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/604955/IPOL_STU(2018)604955_EN.pdf (accessed on 16 February 2024).
50. Human Rights First. Poland's New Front A Government's War against Civil Society. 2017. Available online: https://humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Poland-Report-August-2017-2.pdf (accessed on 16 February 2024).
51. OHCHR. Alternative Report of the Commissioner for Human Rights on the Seventh Periodic Report of the Republic of Poland on Its Implementation of the Provisions of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment for the Period from 15 October 2011 to 15 September 2017. 2018. Available online: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT/CAT/INP/POL/35300&Lang=en (accessed on 16 February 2024).
52. Vecernji List. Ženska Mreža Prosvjedom Tražila Implementaciju Istanbulske Konvencije [Women's Network Croatia through Protest Asked for the Implementation of the Istanbul Convention]. 2018. Available online: https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/zenska-mreza-posvjedom-trazila-implementaciju-istanbulske-konvencije-1247337 (accessed on 16 February 2024).
53. Rawłuszko, M. Producing feminist solidarities in practice. *Eur. J. Politi. Gend.* **2022**, *5*, 382–398. [CrossRef]
54. Sutlović, L. The impact of neoconservative activism on gender policies and the women's movement in Croatia. In *Gendering Democratic Backsliding in Central and Eastern Europe. A Comparative Agenda*; Krizsan, A., Roggeband, C., Eds.; Center for Policy Studies, Central European University: Vienna, Austria, 2019; pp. 31–77.
55. Marini, A. Croatia Ratified the Istanbul Convention and It Was a Big Victory over Fake News. EU Inside. 2018. Available online: https://euinside.eu/en/analyses/croatia-ratified-istanbul-convention-won-first-battle-against-fake-news (accessed on 16 February 2024).
56. WAVE (Women Against Violence Europe). The Founders' Voice: Lepa Mladjenovic and Urszula Nowakowska. 2019. Available online: https://blog.wave-network.org/post-format-video-3 (accessed on 16 February 2024).
57. Hawkesworth, M. Visibility politics: Theorizing racialized gendering, homosociality, and the feminicidal state. *J. Women Cult. Soc.* **2020**, *45*, 311–319. [CrossRef]