

Ideology versus Identity

Anti-gender movements in Europe and their impact on the EU's discourse regarding LGBTI rights towards Central-Eastern and Western European audiences

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1086858

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master in Political Science (MSc)

Specialisation in Gender Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in Politics

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Date submitted: June 24, 2022

Number of words: 22.520

Abstract

In recent years, LGBTI rights have increasingly been considered “core values” of the European Union. However, they have also become politicised and threatened from within the Union, including by anti-gender movements, which campaign against what they call “gender ideology”. This study looks at: (1) the differences between the anti-gender discourses in Central-Eastern and Western Europe, and (2) how these differences influence the discourse that EU actors use regarding LGBTI rights towards the different audiences. These questions are answered using two separate discourse analyses with varying depths, which are brought together to look for signs of adaptation and strategic discourse.

The first analysis shows that there are some differences in the policy priorities of the anti-gender movements in CEE and Western Europe, although they are similar in that resisting marriage equality is the most important and the EU is not explicitly constructed as a threat. The second analysis shows that there is some indication that the EU adopts the policy priorities of the anti-gender movements, although the evidence for this is weak. Another result of the second analysis is that there is a divide between how the EU approaches CEE and Western European audiences; for example, the EU integrates elements of anti-gender discourse into its protection of LGBTI rights, but only towards CEE audiences. The differences between the anti-gender movements cannot justify this divide. The evidence thus shows that the EU *does* strategically adjust its discourse to that of the anti-gender movements, but this is dependent on the perceived audience.

Contents

- Abstract..... 2**
- List of tables..... 5**
- List of figures 5**
- List of abbreviations..... 6**
- Chapter 1: Introduction..... 7**
- Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical framework 11**
 - Anti-gender movements 11
 - Anti-gender movements in East and West 15
 - The EU and the protection of LGBTI rights 18
 - Politicisation of LGBTI rights: Dominant and competing discourses 21
- Chapter 3: Research design..... 25**
 - Methodology: what is a discourse analysis? 25
 - Research design..... 27
 - Case selection..... 32
 - Data and operationalisation..... 34
- Chapter 4: Discourses of anti-gender organisations in CEE and Western Europe..... 39**
 - Us versus them: who are we protecting against what?..... 39
 - Differences between East and West: what are their origin?..... 43
 - The European Union: enemy of the people, or irrelevant? 45
- Chapter 5: EU discourse on LGBTI issues: Issues, perceptions, and presentational strategy 47**
 - Issues on the agenda..... 47
 - LGBTI rights as part of a diverse “Union of Equality” 50
 - Problem perception: who is the “other”? 55
 - Who is the audience? Presentational strategies based on perceived audience 57

Chapter 6: Conclusion and discussion 62

Bibliography 66

Appendices 82

 Appendix 1: Model and codebooks..... 82

 Appendix 2: Justification selection anti-gender organisations..... 91

 Appendix 3: Data for the analysis of anti-gender discourse 94

 Appendix 4: Network of associated terms in discourse of anti-gender movements 95

List of tables

Table 1: List of cases and anti-gender organisations per region 33

Table 2: Speech and opinion pieces by Commissioner Helena Dalli..... 36

Table 3: Relative frequencies of the relevant policies to anti-gender movements in CEE and Western Europe 40

Table 4: Relative frequencies of relevant target actors to anti-gender movements in CEE and Western Europe 40

Table 5: Relative frequencies of entities to protect for anti-gender movements in CEE and Western Europe 41

Table 6: Relative frequencies of justifications used by anti-gender movements in CEE and Western Europe. 44

Table 7: Absolute frequency of problems referenced in communications by Commissioner Dalli..... 48

Table 8: Absolute frequency of actors referenced in communications by Commissioner Dalli 49

Table 9: Absolute frequencies of references to LGBTI rights in communications by Commissioner Dalli..... 52

Table 10: Rainbow Scores for EU member states 54

List of figures

Figure 1: The discursive conflict-consensus continuum 26

List of abbreviations

CEE	Central and Eastern Europe(an)
CJEU	Court of Justice of the European Union
EC	European Commission
EEAS	European External Action Service
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
FRA	EU Fundamental Rights Agency
IDAHOBIT	International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia
ILGA	International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LGBTI(Q)	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, intersex, (queer)
MEPs	Members of European Parliament
NPE	Normative Power Europe
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
PiS	Prawo i Sprawiedliwosc, Law and Justice Party (Poland)
TERFism	Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminism
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
TEU	Treaty on European Union
UN	United Nations

Chapter 1: Introduction

During the Pride Month of June in 2021, President of the European Commission (EC) Ursula von der Leyen tweeted: “*We stand for the rights of LGBTIQ people everywhere. The rights to be who they are, love whom they want and be fully part of our societies. (...) Pride is at the heart of our European values*” (Von der Leyen, 2021). This expression of support for LGBTI¹ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*² and intersex) rights is exemplary of the current position of the institutional actors of the European Union (EU), which is the result of a decades-spanning process through which “LGBTI rights have been established as a topic that can be and should be addressed by the EU” (Eigenmann, 2019, p. 2). With the adoption of the Amsterdam Treaty in 1999 and the ratification of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union in 2000, the EU became the first intergovernmental organisation worldwide to explicitly enshrine the rights of LGBTI persons in its founding treaties, by explicating the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation (European Union, 1997; 2000; Mos, 2014, p. 634). Initially, LGBTI rights were particularly instrumentalised in deliberations and relations with external partners, through the European External Action Service (EEAS). Through this, the protection of LGBTI rights has become symbolic for Europe, both in the eyes of the Union itself and in those of external actors (Ayoub and Paternotte, 2014, pp. 2-3; Ammaturo, 2015, p. 1154). Eigenmann (2019) argues that, since then, a “tipping point” has been reached regarding the adoption and integration of LGBTI rights as a “core value” of the EU (Eigenmann, 2019, p. 2).

At the same time that LGBTI rights were being institutionalised as core values of the EU, they were being threatened by social movements with growing political prominence within Europe: anti-gender movements. Anti-gender movements are social mobilisations against “gender ideology”, a term used to refer to the deconstruction of gender differences as not biologically but socially determined, as well as women’s and LGBTI rights activism (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018, p. 8; Wittenius, 2021, p. 3). Anti-gender discourse first arose in Catholic circles in the 1990s, in response to recognition of sexual and reproductive rights by the United Nations (UN) (Chappel, 2006). For the Holy See, the notion of gender presented an attack on

¹ LGBTI is an umbrella term for many gender identifications and sexualities. The acronym ‘LGBTI’ is in a constant state of development, which means that many sources use different acronyms, from LGBT to LGBTQIA2S+. This study uses LGBTI consistently, but the used acronyms in quoted sources are respected.

² Following the example of Verloo and Van der Vleuten (2020), this study uses the term trans* (pronounced “trans star”) rather than transgender, as trans* more explicitly includes both binary and non-binary non-cis people (Verloo and Van der Vleuten, 2020, p. 225). Transgender and non-binary people are however mentioned separately when this is appropriate to the context.

tradition family relations and the “natural” order of the sexes (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018, p. 12). Especially anti-LGBTI actions by these movements have led to mass mobilisation in many EU member states, with the term “LGBTI ideology” coming to replace “gender ideology” in some countries (Korolczuk, 2020, p. 166).

Anti-gender movements have also found their way to the political sphere of some countries; the most prominent examples are the allocation of almost one third of Poland as ‘LGBTI ideology-free zones’ by local governments by 2020, and the adoption of a law prohibiting content and education for children that “promotes homosexuality” by Hungary in 2021. (Ciobanu, 2021; Roskopf and Chrysoloras, 2021). Besides their priorities, political actors have also adopted the discourse of anti-gender movements: in a campaign speech in 2020, the Polish president, Andrzej Duda from the far-right PiS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwosc, Law and Justice Party) said: “LGBT is not people, it is an ideology” (Walker, 2020). Although these recent prominent examples are both from a Central and Eastern European (CEE) country, anti-gender talking points have also reached the political level in Western European countries like Spain, Italy, and the Netherlands (Graff and Korolczuk, 2022, p. 3).

Although anti-gender movements are present and relevant in many EU member states, EU actors’ response and discursive approach to LGBTI rights has been characterised by an East-West divide (Kulpa, 2014; Ammaturo, 2015). This was demonstrated most prominently by the fact that when the European Council wrote a declaration in support of LGBTI rights, it was signed by the leaders of seventeen member states, including only two from CEE, but research has also shown that the way members of the European Parliament (MEPs) approach LGBTI rights is partially determined by their national origin (Eder and Darmanin, 2021; Ahrens et al., 2021). But why is this divide present? The theory of discursive institutionalism predicts that the communicative discourse of actors is influenced by the context in which it is spoken; this includes institutionalised discourse, such as the adoption of LGBTI rights as core values of the EU, but also competing discourses, those that challenge the institutionalised understanding (Lynggaard, 2019, p. 68). Discourse is

Following from discursive institutionalist theory, the question thus arises whether there are any significant differences between the anti-gender discourses in CEE and Western Europe that explain the East-West divide in their approach to LGBTI rights. Although a lot of research has been done into the discourse, priorities, and networks of anti-gender movements in Europe (for examples, see: Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018; Darakchi, 2019; Corredor, 2019; Korolczuk and Graff, 2018; Kováts, 2017; Margarit, 2019; Sosa, 2021; Vaggione, 2020), there is a lack of research on how these movements influence the EU’s protection of LGBTI rights. Additionally,

no such research has been done using a discursive institutionalist lens, examining the anti-gender movements' influence on European discourse on LGBTI rights. The research question is thus: *how do the discourses of anti-gender movements in Central-Eastern Europe and Western Europe differ from each other, and how do these differences impact the discourse of the European Commission surrounding LGBTI rights towards different audiences in Central-Eastern and Western Europe?*

Societally, this question is relevant firstly because it will first identify the discursive and issue priorities of the anti-gender movements in European member states. This allows for the identification of the areas in which LGBTI rights are being challenged, and where LGBTI people and communities in those member states may require more support. Additionally, the identification of the issues of anti-gender movements shows where decisionmakers in these member states and the EU who support LGBTI rights need to be vigilant; what are the threats from within the anti-gender movements, which might be translated into policy in the (near) future? This question is relevant secondly because the EU's ability to protect the rights of LGBTI people inside the Union is fundamental to its legitimacy as a normative power and protector of fundamental rights. The way that EU actors speak and communicate about LGBTI rights, the discourse they adopt, constitutes how they are viewed and the importance they are granted (Bryman, 2016, p. 531; Foucault, 1977). If the EU were to have a blind spot, a lack of attention for one or more forms of anti-gender movement, harm could be caused to the LGBTI community in the countries where that movement is present.

The societal relevance of this study is emphasised by its focus on the discursive behaviour of the European Commission (EC). According to Article 17 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), the EC is the "guardian of the treaties", which protect fundamental rights and values of non-discrimination (European Union, 2012a). Additionally, it is the European Commissioners who are tasked with formulating the EU's equality policy and strategies for the inclusion of minorities. How they communicate about LGBTI rights goes further than just copying talking points: are they actively countering the discourse of anti-gender movements to legitimise their own policy?

This research is theoretically relevant, because it expands the literature on the discourse, priorities, and networks of European anti-gender movements to include how they discursively impact the promotion of LGBTI rights by the EU, specifically the European Commission. The anti-gender movements do not exist in a vacuum, they are a political force within a Union of which the leaders have prioritised the furthering of equality. Some studies have analysed the presence of anti-gender discourse in political arenas like the European Parliament (EP) (for

example: Ahrens et al., 2021), but no such study has been done to analyse the impact of anti-gender discourse on the way that the EC communicates about LGBTI rights. By doing this, this study applies the approach of discursive institutionalism to LGBTI rights and integrates it with social movement literature, specifically that on anti-gender movements. This is relevant, because many studies with a discursive institutionalist approach, which examines the discursive context within institutions and how actors behave and communicate within them, focus largely on variables within public opinion. This study thus expands that approach to include the conception that social movements are a relevant part of the discursive context within member states and thus the EU, and may have an impact on how EU actors such as the EC express themselves and communicate and legitimise policy. By looking at the link between the communications of EU actors in different contexts and towards different audiences, this study also touches upon the responsiveness literature. Additionally, by critically examining the way in which EC actors conceive and legitimise LGBTI rights and policy through discourse, this study integrates approaches common in gender studies with a focus on European politics.

The research question has two parts, both of which ask for a discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is a collection of methods that study the use of language, and how language is used to produce social reality (Hodges et al., 2008, p. 570; Potter, 1997, p. 146). Different forms of discourse analysis can be ordered along a quantitative-qualitative spectrum (Lynggaard, 2019, p. 57). The first part of the research question, which examines the differences between anti-gender movements in CEE and Western Europe, will be answered using a qualitative content analysis of the founding documents, manifestos, press releases and campaign texts of anti-gender organisations in ten countries in CEE and Western Europe. This method falls in the middle of the quantitative-qualitative spectrum (Mayring, 2015). The second part of the research question will be answered using a more qualitative, inductive method: a problem perception analysis. This approach analyses the communications of European Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli, regarding LGBTI rights towards CEE and Western European audiences, and looks for how she conceptualises the threat to LGBTI rights today. This problematisation forms our understanding of the source of the problem, and the logical solutions (Lynggaard, 2019, p. 59). The answer to the research question will show whether and how anti-gender discourse influences how the EU uses discourse to protect LGBTI rights, and whether this is done equally towards CEE and Western European audiences.

Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical framework

Movements that attempt to counter the development of gender-based and LGBTI rights are present around the world, from Latin and Northern America, from Asia to Europe. Sometimes, the literature interprets these movements as being connected as part of the “Global Right Wing”, defined as “networks of right-wing activists” that work to oppose issues considered to be left-wing (Bob, 2013, p. 71). However, context matters; in Europe, anti-gender movements have risen to prominence in many countries, including EU member states, prompting a broad literature on their origins, actions, and discourse (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018, p. 14). The academic interest in the European anti-gender movements is further spurred by the unique multi-level institutional framework of the European Union, which sees LGBTI rights as a core value (Ayoub and Paternotte, 2014, p. 2).

The following chapter will first review the literature on the origins and discourse of European anti-gender movements, formulating some expectations regarding the differences between East and West based on existing research. After this, the EU’s competences regarding LGBTI equality and the expectations regarding its responsiveness are assessed, based on the theories of discursive institutionalism and communicative responsiveness.

Anti-gender movements

Recent threats to LGBTI rights in CEE countries can be seen as symptoms of the infiltration of the anti-gender movement into the political sphere, specifically to parties in power. Also sometimes referred to as the “war against gender”, anti-gender campaigns, mobilisation, or simply “anti-genderism”, the anti-gender movement is a societal phenomenon that opposes what it calls “gender ideology”: the viewing of gender differences as socially rather than biologically determined (Korolczuk and Graff, 2018, pp. 801-802; Korolczuk, 2014; Wittenius, 2021, p. 3; Vida, 2019, p. 13). Concretely, this means an organised opposition to LGBTI rights such as marriage equality, reproductive rights, sex and gender education, and the study of gender in universities. One opposition strategy is the activation of particular emotions and responses through strategic use of discourse (Foucault, 1977). Discourse is the underlying ideas, frames and power structures behind the language used in a particular setting. The assumption is that discourse is not just language, it is “constitutive of the social world”, and influences how we look at certain concepts, how we interpret them and the necessary actions we derive from that interpretation. Subsequently, language is not neutral; discourses are used strategically to achieve things and influence the behaviour of others (Bryman, 2016, pp. 531-532; Potter and

Wetherell, 1987; Foucault, 1977). In the literature, there is a lively debate surrounding the ideological basis of European anti-gender movements, and what discourses they use are most relevant.

The first discourse that the literature identifies in the European anti-gender movements is what Ayoub (2014) calls the “well-being-of-children” frame (Ayoub, 2014, p. 346). In this frame, LGBTI rights and visibility are tied to the “propagation of homosexuality”; the fear is that by normalising identities that are not heterosexual and cisgender, or even letting children see or come into contact with anyone who is not heterosexual, children will be “perverted” and “turned gay”. Homosexuality, according to this frame, goes against the laws of nature and leads children away from “normalcy” (Wittenius, 2021, p. 7). By activating this discourse in society, the anti-gender movement relies on the mobilisation of emotions of fear and uncertainty, anxiety about rapidly changing social structures, and “public concern” for children’s safety, allowing them to claim majority support (Margarit, 2019, p. 1575; Ayoub, 2014, pp. 346-347). This frame was used by Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán in the justification of the inclusion of a ban of “LGBTI propaganda” in the recent law for the Protection of Children, even insidiously comparing homosexuality with paedophilia (Novak, 2021). Additionally, Ayoub (2014) identifies the “well-being-of-children” frame in Slovenia (Ayoub, 2014, p. 337).

While the “well-being-of-children” frame portrays LGBTI rights as a threat to normalcy, other frames portray them as a threat to the fabric of society and the nation state. In her study of comments on social media, Darakchi (2019) finds that the anti-gender movement in Bulgaria relies heavily on nationalist rhetoric, which identifies feminism, gender equality and LGBTI rights as detrimental to the position of institutions such as marriage and the Church in society, and thus to the nation state and reproduction (Darakchi, 2019, p. 1217; Vida, 2019, p. 13). In this same vein, she notices that the EU is being identified as the spreader of a “radical feminist leftist agenda”, with its gender and LGBTI rights policies being equated with attacks on the freedom of speech during the Communist regime in Bulgaria (Darakchi, 2019, p. 1218). Conjuring the image of LGBTI rights as external attacks is what Ayoub (2014) calls the “defend-the-nation frame”; developing norms on sexuality as detrimental to families, which make up and uphold the nation (Ayoub, 2014, pp. 345-346). It is this nationalist argument that led Butler (2021) to tie anti-gender discourse to trends of fascism (Butler, 2021). LGBTI rights can even be framed as a threat to national security; according to Bajpai (2000), a dimension of national security is “an absence of a threat to acquired values” (Bajpai, 2000, p. 8). In societies where religion plays a prominent role in national identification and the formulation of societal values, LGBTI rights are seen as a threat to national security. This is the case in Bulgaria, where

the nationalist rhetoric has heavy ties with religion: gender and LGBTI rights policies are constructed as inconsistent with religious values, which are seen as an integral part of the identity of the nation (Darakchi, 2019, pp. 1209-1212). Similar contexts can be seen in Romania, where organisations driving the anti-gender movement exploit a nationalist public opinion by referring to national security and religious values, and in Turkey, where institutionalised conservative Islamic values combine with anti-feminism to oppose gender policies (Margarit, 2019, p. 1575; Çağatay, 2019). This same mechanism is also identified by Ayoub (2014) in Poland; according to him, the prominent role of the Catholic Church in the Polish construction of the nation state contributes to the susceptibility of Polish society to anti-gender mobilisation (Ayoub, 2014, p. 338).

Although the above discussion shows the two ideas about the dominant discourses of the anti-gender movements, there are two agreements to be found in the literature. The first is the labelling of LGBTI people, communities, and identities as “ideology”. According to Paternotte and Kuhar (2018), the use of the word “ideology” operates as a “powerful interpretive frame”, activating mental associations with political conspiracies aimed at the alleged manipulation of human rights language to impose deviant norms on normal, average citizens (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018, pp. 7-8). Research shows that the visibility of LGBTI communities and activists in public spaces and debate can work to counter this harmful frame. However, the infiltration of anti-gender movements actors and ideas into the political arena means that increasingly, legislation is enacted that attempts to render communities invisible, upholding stigma (Ayoub, 2016, p. 4; Lombardo et al., 2021, p. 521).

The second agreement is surrounding the movement’s religious origins. The emergence of the resistance to gender policy and LGBTI rights and norms can be traced back to the anathematisation (the declaration of something as accursed) of gender by the Vatican, which later translated into their position of opposition to “gender ideology” (Vaggione, 2020, p. 253; Darakchi, 2019, p. 1220; Paternotte and Kuhar, 2017, p. 267). This is visible through various condemnations of “gender ideology” by the current Pope, Francis, for example in Manila and Slovakia in 2015, and Azerbaijan in 2016 (O’Connell, 2015; Ring, 2015; Francis, 2016). In this way, Francis is continuing the line of his predecessor, Benedict XVI (Case, 2019, p. 641). This religious institutional vision provides the start of the rejection of gender policy and sexual diversity on the basis of their alleged incompatibility with Christian values. There are also many direct links between anti-gender organisations in various countries and Catholic institutions, with most leaders being active in Catholic circles (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2017, p. 267; Darakchi, 2019, pp. 1209-1212). However, it is not only Catholic organisations that perpetuate

anti-gender discourse; other religious organisations, for example the Orthodox Church in Bulgaria and Islamic organisations in Turkey have been shown to be active in the movements (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2017, p. 269; Darakchi, 2019, p. 1210; Çağatay, 2019). Additionally, the anti-gender movements' ideological construction and discursive strategies, partly shaped in reference to religion, are used by a variety of actors, including religious fundamentalists, but also right-wing parties, family associations, and nationalist organisations among others (Korolczuk and Graff, 2018, p. 798; Paternotte and Kuhar 2017, p. 263; Wittenius, 2021, p. 2). The religious frame is favourable to far-right and populist parties and groups, who adopt these frames to propagate an “essentialist and racist concept of national identity”, which rejects any form of diversity, be it ethnic, gender-based, or sexual (Margarit, 2019, p. 1573). Korolczuk and Graff (2018) agree with this. According to them, right-wing anti-gender actors use religion and “appeals to dignity, theology, and moral values” to mask their political orientation and connections (Korolczuk and Graff, 2018, p. 804).

Besides the discussion on the content of the discourse of anti-gender movements, there is also disagreement about their nature. The question is whether they are domestic reactions to specific national legislation (a countermovement), or a transnational phenomenon that exists regardless of the existence of specific legislation, be it with national variation. The former is defended among others by Ayoub (2014), who argues that because many conservative anti-gender movements (for example those in Poland) are rooted in nationalism, they are unable to create an overarching transnational narrative and thus establish the cross-border ties necessary for a transnational movement (Ayoub, 2014, p. 355). Corredor (2019) argues that although there are similarities across borders, all anti-gender mobilisations are essentially countermovements, backlash or resistance to domestic legislation that seeks to further sexual or gender equality (Corredor, 2019, p. 613). Margarit (2019) describes the process of how countermovements emerge almost simultaneously with the movements themselves, reinforcing the idea that anti-gender movements that operate against LGBTI rights emerged as a backlash to emerging LGBTI advocacy groups and their demands (Margarit, 2019, pp. 1573-1575).

However, according to Paternotte and Kuhar (2017), European anti-gender movements are anything but countermovements. According to them, they do not primarily counter forthcoming legislation, but have as their goal and strategy to prevent legislation from emerging in the first place (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2017, pp. 254-257). This can only be done with substantial resources, and for this the domestic anti-gender movements are not alone. In fact, anti-gender movements can be seen as a transnational network of governmental and non-governmental organisations, forming an alliance that spans ideologies and religions (Vida,

2019, p. 14; Korolczuk and Graff, 2018, pp. 798; 804; Giritli Nygren et al., 2018, p. 5; Vaggione, 2020, p. 256; Wittenius, 2021, p. 4). Networks of this nature were noticed by Chappell (2006) when it came to the negotiation of gender policy at the level of the United Nations in the 1990s. According to her, these networks were highly organised, with developed information channels and structures (Chappell, 2006, p. 519). Today, anti-gender non-governmental organisations in one country, although they may appear grassroots, are often financed by elite groups in another country (Sosa, 2021, p. 7; Darakchi, 2019, p. 1212). The “basic discursive alphabet” that is utilised by the movements across Europe is the same, although they cater this alphabet to national political and societal contexts (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2017, p. 253; Wittenius, 2021, p. 1).

Anti-gender movements in East and West

If anti-gender movements are part of a transnational network of organisations and actors, how far does this network span? Are all the movements in Europe connected, or are there multiple networks? A substantial amount of the literature on European anti-gender movements has a focus on Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, including Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland, Slovenia, Croatia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia (for examples see: Margarit, 2019; Vida, 2019; Kováts and Petö, 2017; Darakchi, 2019; Ayoub, 2014; Korolczuk, 2020; Kuhar, 2017; Vučković Juroš et al., 2020; Guasti and Bustikova, 2020). Korolczuk and Graff (2018) even emphasise that according to them, Russia, Eastern Europe, and the Global South are the key “battlegrounds” of the anti-gender movement, while Mos (2013) speaks of an “attitudinal chasm” between open-minded countries like Sweden and the Netherlands and less-tolerant countries in CEE (Korolczuk and Graff, 2018, p. 805; Mos, 2013, p. 84).

The same focus can be identified in the protection of LGBTI rights by different EU institutions, for example in their response to anti-LGBTI legislation in Poland and Hungary; in July of 2021, the EC started a litigation process against both countries for the infringement of Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), which enshrines respect for human rights (European Commission, 2021). Additionally, members of the European Council signed a letter denouncing the Hungarian law, and the European Parliament declared the EU an “LGBTI-Freedom Zone” (Rankin, 2021; European Parliament, 2021). These responses have been characterised by an apparent East-West divide. This is demonstrated firstly by the fact that the letter from the Council was signed by seventeen out of twenty-seven member states, with only two CEE states among them: Estonia and Latvia (Eder and Darmanin, 2021). Secondly, Ahrens

et al. (2021) show that in political groups in the European Parliament where the protection of human rights is not an explicit part of the party identity, whether or not an individual MEP defines LGBTI rights as human rights depends on national origin, with MEPs from CEE countries being less likely to do so (Ahrens et al., 2021, p. 13). Human Rights Watch characterised the divide in responses to LGBTI rights in the European Union as “political difference between zones of Russian and EU influence” (Reid, 2021).

However, Paternotte and Kuhar (2017) argue that the lens of the East-West divide is not analytically useful, because anti-gender movements are present in virtually all European countries, be that in different configurations of actors and policy focusses (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2017, p. 253). Additionally, emphasising CEE member states in the condemnation of anti-LGBTI policies and sentiments has been criticised as creating the illusion of supposedly more “pure” Western European countries, while this is not necessarily the case (Kulpa, 2014, p. 435). Anti-gender movements have been identified in countries like Spain, France, and Germany (see for example: Corredor, 2019, p. 613; Cornejo and Pichardo Galán, 2017; Stambolis-Ruhstorfer and Tricou, 2017; Villa, 2017). In their yearly review of LGBTI rights, ILGA Europe showed that anti-gender ideology is gaining ground throughout Europe. The rhetoric and argumentation of these movements have been adopted by politicians, media, and social movement actors (even including some feminists) in recent years, which it connects to a growing number of hate crimes in European member states, including France, Germany, and the Netherlands (ILGA, 2022a, p. 7; Zalan, 2021; Abou-Chadi et al., 2021, p. 312). Additionally, as reported by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), more than half of the LGBTI people in the EU experienced harassment and discrimination because of their identity in the past five years (FRA, 2021, p. 17).

Thus, anti-gender movements are present all over Europe. However, it cannot be assumed that the discourse they use is comparable in all countries. Based on the literature and current affairs, I expect that there will be two key differences between anti-gender movements in CEE and Western Europe. Firstly, I expect that the different political opportunities in states, including the existing institutional protection of LGBTI rights and equalities, lead to the anti-gender movements having different targets. In their study of anti-gender movements, Paternotte and Kuhar (2017) observe that “transgender rights have rarely been attacked by anti-gender activists (...)”, further saying that issues surrounding marriage equality could expect the most mobilisation (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2017, p. 259). However, this is not the case everywhere; in countries where marriage equality is established, opposition to it is electorally less popular. In these contexts, anti-gender movements may shift their attention to other targets, such as trans*

people and identities (Abou-Chadi et al., 2021, pp. 311-312). Additionally, Pearce et al. (2020) show how in countries where susceptibility to appeals to religious values is low, anti-gender and specifically anti-trans* discourse and hate speech has found its way into “forms of ‘respectable’ middle-class feminism”. This form of “gender critical”, or trans-exclusionary radical “feminism” (TERFism) frames trans* and non-binary people as dangerous to children and women, and has found its way into traditional media and sometimes even academia (Gunnarsson Payne and Tornhill, 2021; Hines, 2020; Hotine, 2021; Pearce et al., 2020, pp. 882-885; for an example of how legal arguments are used to deny the rights of transgender women to equal treatment, see Price (2020)). ILGA Europe, in their yearly review of LGBTI rights, observed a rise in anti-trans* rhetoric and violence in countries like Spain, Finland, and Sweden in 2020 (ILGA, 2021a). According to Verloo and Van der Vleuten (2020), trans* issues have reached political agendas in a relatively small timeframe (Verloo and Van der Vleuten, 2020, p. 223). This means that their presence in the discourse of anti-gender movements remains relatively understudied. The expectation is thus that in countries where marriage equality is established, mostly Western European countries, that anti-gender movements will more often target trans* and non-binary people. Subsequently, it is also the expectation that anti-gender discourses in CEE countries will primarily focus on issues of same-sex marriage.

The second expectation regarding the differences in discourse between anti-gender movements in CEE and Western Europe is related to their stance towards the EU. Within the EU, critical literature identifies a complex dynamic between older, often Western European member states, and newer, largely post-communist member states. Discursively, a divide is made between them by European actors; at one end of this divide lies the liberal West, while at the other end there are the illiberal CEE countries, who need to “catch up” with standards of liberalisation (Ammaturo, 2015, p. 1161). LGBTI rights are in this divide used as an indicator of “progress” reserved for Western societies, what Puar (2007) calls homonationalism (Puar, 2007, p. 3). This is what Kulpa (2014) calls a relationship of “leveraged pedagogy”: CEE countries figure as “objects of Western pedagogy” that are perpetually in transition towards liberalism but never liberal enough (Kulpa, 2014, p. 432). Ammaturo (2015) recognises this mechanism in the EU’s actions regarding LGBTI issues; a focus on legal equality rather than the lived experiences of LGBTI people in all member states creates an artificial fracture between countries that are seen as “queer-friendly” and those that are seen as homophobic, while the ‘homophobic’ countries will never be seen as truly European (Ammaturo, 2015, p. 1152). The labelling of entire countries as “queer-friendly” or “homophobic” plays into a powerful metaphor of the “state-as-a-person”, which is entrenched in global politics. Although

metaphors like these are a powerful tool with which to make sense of international and supranational relations, they also work to hide important aspects of reality (Chilton and Lakoff, 1989, pp. 11; 15). After the passing of the 2021 Hungarian anti-LGBTI bill, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said that Hungary “had no business staying in the European Union” (Tadeo and Albanese, 2021). By referring to “Hungary” instead of the more accurate naming of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who was responsible for the bill, he was ignoring the lived realities of the millions of people (including LGBTI people) living in Hungary, who suffer from the bill and would face the economic and political consequences of such an exit.

Rather than promoting norms of LGBTI equality, such an approach has only served to further entrench the political resistance to them, as they are seen as an imposition from the EU and the ‘West’ (Kováts, 2017, p. 184; Ammaturo, 2015, p. 1161). As LGBTI rights have become a symbol for the EU, they have also become a symbol with which to oppose the EU for governments and right-wing activists (Ayoub and Paternotte, 2017, p. 3; Paternotte and Kuhar, 2017, p. 277; Darakchi, 2019, p. 1209). How this works out discursively has been shown by Korolczuk and Graff (2018), who observe the use of the “anticolonial frame” by anti-gender movements. This frame equates the introduction of gender and LGBTI rights policy with colonisation, rejecting global capitalism and liberal individualism while demonising neoliberal “elites”, in service of illiberal populism. By adopting this frame, the anti-gender movements co-opt the arguments of the decolonisation movements in the Global South, in order to counter equality policy and activism (even when it is the activism of fellow citizens) (Korolczuk and Graff, 2018, pp. 797-798). The expectation is thus that frames that explicitly counter the EU will be more present in the discourse of the anti-gender movements in CEE, than in those in Western Europe.

The EU and the protection of LGBTI rights

The previous section showed how anti-gender movements have become prevalent all over Europe, and formulated some expectations for how they might differ between Western Europe and CEE. This section will look into the EU’s competences regarding LGBTI issues, and theorise the current situation.

When it comes to the protection of LGBTI rights in the EU, anti-discrimination law is derived from multiple sources. Firstly, Articles 2 and 3 of the TEU consolidate the EU's duty to protect the rights of minorities (Shreeves, 2020; European Union, 2012a). Secondly, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is prohibited through Article 10 of the Treaty

on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), and Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, which was the first international human rights charter to do so (European Union, 1997; 2000; 2012b; Mos, 2014, p. 634; Shreeves, 2020). Although discrimination based on gender identity is not mentioned, later jurisprudence from the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) shows that it can be interpreted as falling under the discrimination on the basis of sex (Sivonen, 2011, p. 13). However, this approach and interpretation to protection of diverse gender identities has been criticised for its reinforcement of gender binaries and omission of non-binary and intersex identities and transgender persons who do not undergo gender-confirmatory procedures (Espinhaço Gomes, 2019, p. 65).

Besides the treaties, concrete protection of LGBTI rights in different social domains needs to be consolidated through Directives. According to the FRA, this framework means that the EU is ill-equipped to deal with growing homo- and transphobia. Currently, the Framework Decision of Racism and Xenophobia, which determines what is considered a hate crime by the EU, does not include motivations based on the sexual orientation or gender identity of the victim (FRA, 2021, pp 17-18). Regarding discrimination, the Employment Equality Directive (2000/78/EC) implores member states to ensure equal treatment in the labour market and access to employment, by prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (but not gender identity). The Equal Treatment Directive, which would expand protection to the social domain, healthcare, and housing among others, has not yet been approved by the European Council, after its proposal by the Commission in 2008 (FRA, 2021, pp. 20-21; Equinet, 2018). This means that protection for sexual diversity remains contained to the domain of employment (FRA, 2021, pp. 20-21; Shreeves, 2020). The EU's further legal competences for the protection of LGBTI people against discrimination and violence are low, as member states have the primary jurisdiction over areas like marriage, adoption, and medical law. Despite this, the EU, and specifically the Commission, sees an important role for itself in the promotion, coordination, and monitoring of LGBTI rights initiatives (European Commission, 2020b). In the EC's 'LGBTIQ Equality Strategy', published in 2020, there is reference to "a worrying trend in *parts* of Europe" (emphasis added), after which some examples of anti-LGBTI incidents in CEE countries are mentioned (European Commission, 2020, p. 4; ILGA, 2020). Thus, despite anti-gender movements targeting LGBTI people being present in virtually all member states of the European Union, the powerful EU response still remains focussed on CEE countries, while general progress remains stagnant.

Although the internal competences of the EU regarding LGBTI rights are low, in recent years, LGBTI rights have become considered to be a "core value" of the EU, closely tied to the

Union's identity (Eigenmann, 2019, p. 2). Previously, the focus on the furthering of LGBTI rights by the EU laid on the external sphere, through the European Neighbourhood Policy, the EU Enlargement Policy, and trade policy (Mos, 2013). This is congruent with the theory of a Normative Power Europe (NPE), first theorised by Ian Manners (2002). According to this theory, the EU's nature as a hybrid polity with common principles, its historical context, and its political-legal constitution allow it to exercise 'power over opinion' in its relations with other states. Thus, according to Manners, the EU puts universal norms and principles "at the centre of its relations with its member states and the world" (Manners, 2002, pp. 239-241). Mos (2013) shows that this is how the EU wishes to function regarding the protection LGBTI rights in external policy (Mos, 2013, p. 88).

The theory of NPE, developed in 2002, is partially based on the assumption that there is a resounding consensus between the member states of the EU on the "normative basis of the Union", the content of the core norms of the Union, which include democracy, rule of law, human rights, and anti-discrimination and the protection of minorities (Manners, 2002, p. 242). However, according to Bertolini and Dawson (2021), in a "multi-level legal order" such as the EU, collective norms such as fundamental rights are always going to play a unifying as well as a divisive role (Bertolini and Dawson, 2021, p. 649). In 2005, the Enlargement policy was amended to include fundamental rights as a hard condition for accession in 2005, and LGBTI issues were explicitly defined as a key issue in the *acquis communautaire*, the collection of laws and principles that all member states must adhere to before joining the Union, in 2013 (Slootmaeckers and Touquet, 2016, pp. 22-23). This was too late for the Eastern Enlargement in 2004, in which ten new member states joined, and the accession of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007 and Croatia in 2013 (European Parliament, 2013). This means that LGBTI rights were not a part of the conversation in which the collective norms of *all* EU member states were formed. After accession, the EU's limited competences surrounding LGBTI policies mean that improving the lived experiences of LGBTI people relies on the voluntary action of member states (Stenqvist, 2009, p. 7). Thus, the assumption of consensus regarding collective norms is no longer correct. The Polish and Hungarian anti-LGBTI "ideology" laws are a stark example of how this assumption no longer holds. This internal disagreement affects the credibility of the EU as a normative power in its external relations (Mos, 2013, p. 89).

Politicisation of LGBTI rights: Dominant and competing discourses

The Hungarian and Polish laws and the East-West divide in the European response as discussed above show that LGBTI rights, far from there being a consensus, have become or always have been a politicised subject within the European Union. Although the influence and organisation of LGBTI advocacy groups in some CEE countries dramatically improved after accession through EU support (O'Dwyer, 2012, p. 332), discourses of homophobia and heteronormativity remain common in the political spheres of many CEE countries, contesting norms of LGBTI rights (Mole, 2016, pp. 117-118). Some Western countries have also shown a (re)politicisation of LGBTI rights in the political sphere (Abou-Chadi et al., 2021, p. 312). According to Palonen et al. (2019), politicisation in its broadest sense means the “turning of something that previously was not a subject to political action into something that is now subject to political action” (Palonen et al., 2019, p. 249). In the context of the EU, Zürn et al. (2012) define politicisation as “(...) increased public mobilisation of competing political preferences regarding institutions’ policies or procedures” (Zürn et al., 2012, as cited in Rauh et al., 2019, p. 399). LGBTI rights have emerged as a marker of a European identity, as a “symbolic boundary” between the European Self and the “other”. When LGBTI rights become politicised and questioned from within the Union, however, they are thus not only a source of identity construction, but also a source of a European identity crisis, a destabilisation of the European identity at both the institutional and the societal level (Slootmaeckers, 2019, p. 347). This crisis must be resolved if the EU is to legitimately operate externally as a united normative actor, and if the EU is to remain stable internally, both socially and institutionally (Joannin, 2018). The push and pull between fundamental rights norms and anti-LGBTI and anti-gender movements can be viewed through the lens of discourse. The construction of LGBTI rights as a core value of the EU is the dominant discourse within the European institutions (Eigenmann, 2019, p. 2; Ayoub and Paternotte, 2017, p. 2). In the member states, competing discourses contesting LGBTI rights norms are gaining ground or have become dominant. It differs per member state what the dominant discursive figuration is, based partially on the characteristics of the anti-gender movements in that state. (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2017, p. 253).

Although the EU’s legal and legislative competences surrounding LGBTI issues are low, the promotion of LGBTI rights by EU actors could have a large impact on public opinion and the dominant discourses in member states; according to discursive institutionalist theory, discourse has a “transformative power” for political change (Lynggaard, 2019, p. 8; Gabel and Scheve, 2007). Discursive institutionalism, developed by Schmidt (2010), is an approach to research on discourse which considers not only ideas and discourse, but also the institutional

context in which they evolve. To do this, Schmidt distinguishes between two types of discourse: coordinative, which includes the elite construction of ideas, and communicative discourse, which considers the communication of ideas to the public by elites (Schmidt, 2010; Lynggaard, 2019, p. 37). According to Lynggaard (2019), communicative discourse can be used especially by elites to legitimise policy and institutional choices (Lynggaard, 2015; 2019, pp. 8-9).

However, the impact of a particular discourse differs based on the context into which it is received (Larsen, 2014, p. 434). EU actors could integrate this assumption into their strategy, by using a particular discourse to adapt to the dominant societal (in)tolerance in one member state, while adapting differently to the discursive configurations in another state. In their study of citizen discourse surrounding European enlargement, Dimitrova and Kortenska (2017) find different discursive configurations in four member states, and give suggestions for how the EU could discursively legitimise future enlargements (Dimitrova and Kortenska, 2017, pp. 273-274). The concept of communicative discourse also considers the impact of public discourse on EU politics; European discourse thus not only attempts to influence national discourse, but is also influenced *by* it (Lynggaard, 2019, p. 9). This assumes a certain level of political communicative and discursive responsiveness to national discourse. In their study of the content of the speeches of European elites, Rauh et al. (2019) operate under the same assumption; they theorise that different configurations of Euroscepticism in member states would lead European elites to utilise different frames and discourses surrounding European integration when addressing different audiences (Rauh et al., 2019, p. 397).

But is this same mechanism to be expected when it comes to LGBTI rights discourse? Euroscepticism may manifest as rejection of the Union as a whole and thus touches upon issues fundamental to the legitimacy and survival of the Union (Rauh et al., 2019, p. 400). As discussed in previous sections, LGBTI rights have been adopted as a core value of the Union, and the discourses of some anti-gender movements encompass Eurosceptic elements. For these reasons, the expectation is that the same mechanism will be present – the discourse of EU actors regarding LGBTI rights will be different dependent on whether they are communicating to a Western or CEE audience, because they strategically adapt to domestic discourses surrounding gender and LGBTI rights (Eigenmann, 2019; Paternotte and Kuhar, 2017, p. 276; Korolczuk and Graff, 2018).

The first expectation regarding the discourse of EU actors regarding LGBTI rights thus follows from the theory of discursive institutionalism and predicts that EU actors will communicate differently towards different audiences in order to legitimise its policy and institutional choices. But *how* will the discourses be different? A previous discussion showed

the link between anti-gender discourse and anti-EU sentiments, where norms of gender and LGBTI equality are seen as an “infiltration” from the West, even going so far as utilising an anti-colonial frame (Korolczuk and Graff, 2018). In their study, Rauh et al. (2019) discover that, when confronted with Eurosceptic sentiments that are threatening to become or already are a majority position, EU Commissioners are likely to send positive messages and defend the EU values. They call this the re-legitimation strategy, actively engaging in legitimation efforts where it is low (Rauh et al., 2019, p. 418). Because LGBTI rights have become part of the core values and dominant discourse of the EU, the second expectation is that the more anti-EU sentiment is present in the discourse of the anti-gender movements, the more EU actors will emphasise the dominant discourse that LGBTI rights are a core value of the EU that need to be protected. This will be visible in the explicit linking between LGBTI rights, the EU, and other core values such as democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. As the previous section on anti-gender movements predicted that CEE anti-gender discourse would more explicitly reject the EU, the expectation is thus that these indications will be more visible towards CEE audiences. When anti-gender discourse does not explicitly frame the EU as a threat, such as is predicted in Western Europe, EU discourse will be more likely to emphasise the general importance of LGBTI rights, without making an explicit link to EU values.

The third expectation regarding the (non)responsiveness of EU actors to the discourse of anti-gender movements stems from a critical reading of the current legal and policy framework regarding gender equality and LGBTI rights protection. As described previously, the current legal anti-discrimination framework limits the protection of LGBTI rights to sexual orientation, and only in the context of employment. Discrimination on the basis of gender identity, which includes trans* and non-binary identities, is omitted completely. In the case of medical transition, discrimination against transgender people is prohibited in reference to the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sex (Sivonen, 2011, p. 13; Equinox, 2021, p. 21). This very limited understanding of the discrimination that LGBTI people and communities face is criticised as outdated and obsolete, and as “false modernity”; although EU policy documents like the LGBTI Equality Strategy claim to strive for an intersectional approach, the legal reality is that the European institutions continue to use “gender” in exclusively binary terms, and equate biological sex with gender (Vicente-Palacio, 2020, p. 110; Espinhaço Gomes, 2019, p. 65). This ignores the way in which socialised and institutionalised conceptions and norms of gender and the roles that are attached to them negatively impact the lives of those who “violate” those norms, such as trans* and non-binary people (Equinox, 2021, p. 8). Rather than static, binary, and linear, gender is fluid, malleable and multi-faceted, and the EU fails to recognise

these properties, reflecting an institutional assumption that one is either a man or a woman (binary normativity), based on male or female biological sex (cisnormativity) (Theilen, 2016, p. 388; McNeilly, 2019, p. 444; Espinhaco Gomes, 2019, p. 73). Because of the EU's failure to recognise the limitations and harms of the binary approach to gender, the expectation is that EU communications surrounding LGBTI rights will have no reference to the discrimination trans* and non-binary people face due to their rejection of binary gender, even if these communities are explicitly targeted by the anti-gender movements. Instead, reference to trans* people will most likely be about discrimination they face due to their transition, either medically or in employment. Because a previous section in this chapter predicted that anti-trans* discourse will be more prominent in Western European anti-gender discourse, the expectation is that the EU will also reference trans* and non-binary people more in their communications towards Western European audiences. There is thus an expected difference in the number of references towards CEE and Western European audiences, but the content is not expected to be different due to the existing framework for protection of trans* people in the EU.

Chapter 3: Research design

To answer the research question *how do the discourses of anti-gender movements in Central-Eastern Europe and Western Europe differ from each other, and how do these differences impact the discourse of the European Commission surrounding LGBTI rights towards different audiences in Central-Eastern and Western Europe?* this study will make use of two discourse analyses. This chapter will first shortly introduce the concept of discourse and what a discourse analysis is, after which the research design, case selection, data, and operationalisation will be explained.

Methodology: what is a discourse analysis?

In its most traditional sense, discourse can be defined as the way that language is used to produce social reality, how we make sense of the world (Potter, 1997, p. 146; Bryman, 2016, p. 532). However, discourse can be much broader than just language; even objects such as historical monuments, pieces of clothing, forms of media, and political strategies have discursive qualities (Wodak and Meyer, 2012, p. 3). Discourse is more than the language and the objects as such; it is how these things create a version of reality which may become dominant, or ‘common sense’. In this sense, discourses are anything but neutral; they can be used to construct (unequal) relations of power, establish and/or reinforce ideologies, and inspire action (Fairclough, 2006; Van Dijk, 1993; Potter, 2004, p. 609).

Discourse analysis, then, is the study of the creation of these collective meaning systems, but also their “products”: knowledge, ideological positions, legitimisation of relationships, and what is accepted behaviour in certain contexts, to name a few (Lynggaard, 2019, p. 2). The term “discourse analysis” encompasses a spectrum of methods; from (computer-assisted) content analysis which is interested in the identification of themes and is often theory-based, to post-positivist critical discourse analysis, which is interested in the way that discourses (re)produce social domination, and is problem-oriented (Lynggaard, 2019, p. 57; Wodak and Meyer, 2012, p. 9). Discourse analysis is generally considered to be a qualitative method, as it is concerned with the way actors make sense of the world around them (Burck, 2005, p. 248). However, the more recent introduction of discourse analysis computer programmes means that a quantitative element may be present, for example in the counting of the number of times a particular term is used (Rourke and Anderson, 2004, p. 5). An example of a study that uses a critical approach to discourse analysis is Sengul’s (2019) study of right-wing populist discourse in the speech of an Australian senator, while at the other end of the

spectrum, Facciani et al. (2015) studied the representation of racial minorities and women in comic books by utilising a quantitative content analysis (Sengul, 2019; Facciani et al., 2015). As this study is interested in discourse, forms of discourse analysis will be used to first discover the content of the anti-gender discourses in CEE and Western Europe, after which the discourses of EU actors regarding LGBTI rights will be analysed, to determine whether they are impacted by the discursive configurations in the two regions.

Before the research design can be laid out, some strategic choices must be made explicit. Firstly, the placement of this study on the agency-structure divide. According to Lynggaard (2019), this divide can be seen as a spectrum with two ideal types: (1) the structure-focussed approach which deals with the power structures created by discourse, and (2) the agency-focussed approach with studies how actors themselves (re)create and change discourses (Lynggaard, 2019, p. 23). The expectation of this study is that EU actors strategically utilise discourse, which means that there is an agency-focussed approach to the discursive analysis; there is power *in* discourse, and agents use this power to create and change meaning structures. However, this study does not fall under the agency-focussed ideal-type, as the examination of the impact of the dominant discourses in member states introduces a structural element, considering the power *of* discourse to formulate and anchor asymmetrical societal power structures.

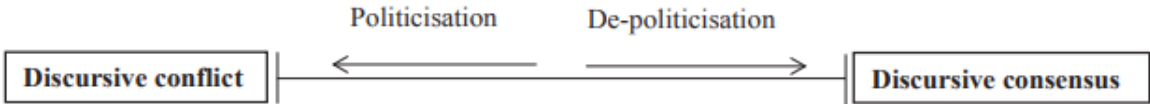


Figure 1: The discursive conflict-consensus continuum³

The second choice considers what Lynggaard calls the “discursive conflict-consensus continuum” (Lynggaard, 2019, p. 26, see Figure 1). In the case of discursive consensus, the issue has been depoliticised; the dominant discourse has become ‘common sense’, and there is little room for political choice. In the case of discursive conflict, however, the presence of competing discourses means that an issue is politicised, often in the form of alternative discourses challenging the dominant discourse. In this case, EU actors might attempt to depoliticise the issue, for example by resorting to technocratic language (Schimmelfennig, 2020). As this study looks at the impact of member state discourses surrounding LGBTI rights

³ Source: Lynggaard, 2019, p. 26.

which are theorised to be competing to the dominant discourse as propagated by the EU, it is comfortably situated towards the conflictual end of the continuum. Now that two strategic choices have been explicated, the next section will discuss the exact research design of this study, based on two discourse analyses.

Research design

Because the research question of this study has two parts, the research design includes three steps. First, the discourses of anti-gender organisations in CEE and Western Europe will be compared, to determine whether and how they differ. Second, the discourses of EU actors surrounding LGBTI rights towards CEE and Western audiences will be compared. Thirdly, these two analyses will be brought together; it will be examined whether EU discourses are influenced by the anti-gender discourses in the member states, by comparing the results of the first and second analysis.

Step one: Anti-gender discourses in CEE and Western Europe

The first analysis will be used to investigate the anti-gender discourses in CEE and Western Europe, and whether and how they differ. To do this, this study will use a comparative case study of ten European member states: five from CEE, and five from Western Europe, making it a medium-N study. The choice for this specific number of cases is the result of a trade-off between feasibility and the time needed for a sufficient analysis of each case, and external validity. The section about case selection below will discuss which member states were chosen and why. A case study is defined by Yin (1994) as “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 1994, p. 13). A comparative case study is then the “systematic comparison of two or more phenomena” (Kaarbo and Beasley, 1999, p. 372). Comparative case studies are often used to examine causal relationships between certain variables and certain characteristics of the cases, for example through a most-different or most-similar systems design (Toshkov, 2016, p. 268). However, according to Goodrick (2019), case studies may also be embedded in larger research designs to “add richness and detail to research claims” (Goodrick, 2019, p. 3). The case study here is more descriptive in nature; I am interested in the differences between the two regions, which can be used in the further analysis to determine the strategic nature of EU discourses.

The biggest advantage of a medium-N case study is that it allows not only for comparison between cases, but also for within-case inference. Context matters and cases are complex, which means that a more in-depth analysis of a small number of cases can add substance to research (Toshkov, 2016, p. 258; Gerring, 2016, pp. 157-159). The biggest disadvantage, however, is that a medium number of cases can lead to a lack of external validity: results may not be generalisable to the larger population of European member states (Elman et al., 2016, p. 385). This study will attempt to avoid this problem as much as possible by strategically selecting the cases to be analysed (see the “Case selection” section below).

To determine the content of the anti-gender discourses in each member state, a method will be used which sits in the middle of the quantitative–qualitative discourse analysis spectrum: qualitative content analysis. According to Mayring (2015), qualitative content analysis is a “coming together” of the hermeneutical, constructivist approach of discourse analysis that wishes to understand the meaning of a text, and a more positivistic approach that wishes to measure and quantify the contents of a text (Mayring, 2015, p. 366). To do this, the analysis takes two steps: first, an interpretive dissection of the text is done to assign categories to text passages. Secondly, the frequency and convergence of the text passages is assessed quantitatively. The goal of the analysis is thus to structure the texts, and filter out particular aspects according to theoretically pre-determined categories. This is what Mayring (2015) calls “deductive category assignment”, the systematic extraction of components from texts on the basis of theoretically determined structuring dimensions that are derived from the research question (Mayring, 2015, p. 376).

To analyse category frequencies and interpret contingencies between texts, the extracted components can be entered into qualitative content analysis software. This study will make use of the software ATLAS.ti (Windows Version 22.0.11.0). This software was developed specifically for qualitative content and data analysis, and has the advantage that it is user-friendly, with multiple analytical functions and easy visualisations of data (ATLAS.ti, 2022; Silver and Lewins, 2014, pp. 61-63).

Advantages of qualitative content analysis are that it allows the researcher to keep sight of the context in which the text is created and consumed, while at the same time allowing for a more systematic approach to textual analysis, increasing the internal validity and reproducibility. To do this, it is crucial that the researcher establishes a “concrete procedure”, including the formulation of a codebook (Mayring, 2015, p. 370). This is at the same time a possible disadvantage of the approach; if this procedure is not stipulated sufficiently, the reliability of the analysis is threatened. The process model of this study is adapted from Mayring

(2015) and can be found in the appendices, along with the codebook (see Appendices 1.1 and 1.2).

Concretely, all data will be coded according to the codebook. Specifically, attention will be paid to (1) who according to the organisation are the enemies (“target actors”), (2) what policy they were campaigning against (“target policy”), (3) who or what they are protecting (“entity to protect”), and (4) what their perception is of the EU, if they mention it at all (“perception European Union”). These codes were determined deductively, based on the theories laid out in Chapter 2. Coding will be done by highlighting passages (“quotations”) that according to me reference one or more of the above categories, and labelling them in the text. ATLAS.ti keeps count of the number of quotations and the number of times certain categories and labels are referenced. This data will be used for the analysis. Although the emphasis of this first analysis lies in deductive analysis, during the process of coding, however, more categories might be determined which might be of theoretical interest, to be retro-actively added to the codebook (see Appendix 1.2). In the analysis, the focus will be on the deductively-established categories, while the inductively-established categories are used to add extra context and explanation.

This analysis will make use of the option to create Code-Document tables in ATLAS.ti. These tables display the relative or absolute frequencies of certain codes in (a group of) documents. Due to differing lengths of the data for CEE and Western Europe, I decided to use the visualisation of relative frequencies of the codes within the documents. This is useful, because it shows the saliency of certain topics and issues in the discourse of these organisations. It can be assumed that if an issue, policy, or actor is mentioned many times within one text, it is of high saliency and/or importance to this organisation. Besides the Code-Document table, ATLAS.ti’s network function was used to create a visualisation of the empirical links between the different categories and codes (see Appendix 4). This was created by adding codes to the network as Nodes, and then adding all the Co-Occurring codes, which are those that were coded to the same quotations in the documents. These two codes were then linked, which created an arrow in the network to show the association between the two codes. These associations will be used to interpret the data in the Code-Document tables.

Step two: EU discourses regarding LGBTI rights to CEE and Western audiences

The second discourse analysis will analyse the discourses of European actors, when they are speaking about LGBTI issues to CEE and Western audiences. This will also be done using a

comparative case study, this one including three cases: communications by an EU actor towards a CEE audience, towards a Western audience, and one speech that has an EU institution such as the EP as an audience. This last case will act as a control group, as the EP has members from all member states and ideological backgrounds. The number of cases means that in contrast to the first analysis, this analysis is a small-N comparative case study.

Again, the number of speeches that can be analysed is constrained by feasibility, as well as data availability. The choice was made to analyse a smaller number of cases because in contrast to the first analysis, this analysis draws on a method that sits more towards the qualitative side of quantitative-qualitative discourse analysis spectrum: problem perception analysis (Lynggaard, 2019, p. 59). This analysis will make use of an inductive logic, which means that the establishment of relevant categories will be driven by the text rather than the theory (Wodak and Meyer, 2012). This means that coding categories will not be formulated in advance in the form of a codebook, but will be established through reading of the material (Mayring, 2015, p. 375). It is relevant for the second part of the research question because the way that EU actors formulate the state of LGBTI equality in Europe says something about what actors and actions they see as threatening to it. As Lynggaard (2019) formulates it: “problem perceptions are ideational symptoms reflecting the discourse within which a set of actors operates” (Lynggaard, 2019, p. 59). Thus, the discursive formulation of a problem has consequences for what we understand as the source of the problem, and what solutions are seen as reasonable.

An advantage of the problem perception approach is that it allows for more attention to the words-in-context than a qualitative context analysis. However, this advantage also has a downside; because it is interested in broader sections of text over the coding of narrower categories, the process can be more cumbersome. However, the process can also be made easier by the use of discourse analysis software, which in this case is also ATLAS.ti (Lynggaard, 2019, p. 60).

Step three: Strategic use of LGBTI rights discourse by the European Union

The final step of the analysis is to bring the results of the first and second steps together, and examine whether domestic anti-gender discourses impact the way European actors approach LGBTI issues when speaking to a CEE or Western audience. Does the EU include the specific discursive configurations regarding LGBTI rights in member states in their problem perception when speaking to an audience from that region? According to Lynggaard (2019), the main assumption under the study of strategic discourse by political actors is that the way that elites

perceive the reception of their communication and policy affects their communication and policy (Lynggaard, 2019, p. 92). For elites, discourse is a powerful tool for the legitimisation and initiation of policy. Practically, this step of the analysis will be integrated into the explanation of the European discourse.

To find a connection between the anti-gender discourse in member states and the communication of European actors, there is no ‘smoking gun’, or one piece of evidence which can prove the link without a doubt. Instead, I look for indications that make it plausible that the EU actors take anti-gender discourses into account in their communication. One indication that discourse is being used strategically is when political elites adopt competing discourses or include some competing discursive elements into their communication. When actors reference other discourses in their own communication, it is an indication that they may be aware of the competing discourses and are attempting to counter or respond to them (Holc, 1992, p. 123; Kwon et al., 2013, p. 283; Laine and Vaara, 2007, p. 29). A second indication is when different discourses or discursive strategies are being used in different settings/contexts/to other audiences. This shows the adaptability of political elites and their ability to estimate the reception certain messages will receive (Lynggaard, 2019, p. 96). The use of strategic discourse regarding LGBTI issues is an indication that the presence of national competing discourses is seen as a threat to the dominant EU discourse, and that national discourses thus have an influence on the discourse of EU actors. National discourses may influence EU discourses because they are part of the context within which these actors operate (Lynggaard, 2019, p. 30).

In this part of the analysis, the results of the two steps are brought together and compared. However, the exact nature of the comparison is dependent on whether the first analysis finds any significant differences between the discourses of anti-gender movements in the two regions. If differences are found, strategic discourses can be assumed when these differences are reflected in the problem perceptions of the EU regarding LGBTI rights in these regions. If no differences are found, it is still worth comparing the EU’s problem perceptions regarding LGBTI rights in their communication towards CEE and Western audiences. In this case, other theoretical explanations regarding differences between CEE and Western Europe will be considered.

Case selection

As stated earlier, in the first two steps of the analysis, the selection of cases for discourse analysis is constrained by both data availability and by feasibility. This is because, despite both analyses being assisted by computer software, any type of discourse analysis asks for a thorough examination and re-examination of every text, a process which is relatively time-consuming. Due to this, the feasibility of the analysis is threatened the more texts are added (Boundarouk and Ruël, 2004, p. 12).

For the first analysis, I decided to compare the anti-gender discourses of organisations in five different CEE countries to those of five organisations in Western Europe, for ten in total. However, it is not self-evident what member states exactly constitute “Central and Eastern” and “Western Europe”. These categories are not only geographical, but also have political, cultural, and historical dimensions, making them highly ambiguous and dependent on context (Kulpa, 2014, p. 433). This is also visible in the divisions made by different (geo)political and non-governmental institutions. When it comes to CEE, the definition is often based on the political and historical dimensions. The political dimension would mean defining CEE on the basis of timing of accession to the EU, while a historical approach might define CEE as “all European countries that were previously ruled by communist regimes (the former Eastern Bloc)” (New World Encyclopaedia, n.d.). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) uses the first approach, seeing CEE as the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia (OECD, 2001). The International Labour Organisation (ILO), in contrast, uses the historical approach, including countries like Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Ukraine in their definition of CEE (ILO, n.d.).

The same ambiguity surrounding geographical reach is present regarding “Western Europe”. In some approaches, the term “Western” loses any geographical meaning, suggesting that Western Europe is defined by *what it is not*, namely not post-communist. This historical approach, as taken by the UCLA Centre for European and Russian Studies (2022) and the World Bank (2022), includes countries like Germany and France, but also Finland and Greece, which purely geographically cannot be considered Western (UCLA, 2022; World Bank, 2022). Other organisations have a much narrower approach; for example, the CIA World Factbook classifies Western Europe as only including Belgium, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands, and the UK (CIA, 2011).

This study divides the EU up into “CEE” and “Western Europe” by using a historical approach; all the post-communist countries (meaning all those that acceded to the EU after

2004, excluding Malta and Cyprus) are CEE, while the “rest” falls under Western Europe. Although this divide is not necessarily geographically correct, it has been chosen because it most accurately reflects the East/West divide as it is imagined and discursively constructed by institutions at both the European and nation-state level (Melegh, 2006; Miklóssy and Korhonen, 2010). There are large differences between countries within regions, even historically (Schwartz and Petrova, 2018, p. 7). Within these two groups, cases have thus been chosen that best represent the diversity that is present within the groups (see Table 1). This means that this study uses stratified random sampling, meaning that cases are divided into groups (subregions), after which a random case is selected from each group (Henry, 1990, p. 18).

“Central and Eastern Europe” is a label that developed relatively recently, in the first half of the twentieth century, and already makes clear that the region encompasses a large diversity of countries and subregions (Hohensee, 1993, p. 88). Using a historical approach, the EU member states in this region can be divided into: (1) former Yugoslavian countries, including Slovenia and Croatia; (2) the Baltic states, including Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania; (3) the Eastern Balkan states, which are Bulgaria and Romania, and; (4) the Central European states, which are Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia (Ekiert and Hanson, 2003). To incorporate the diversity of CEE in this study, one case has been selected randomly from each subregion (see Table 1). There are only four regions, meaning that there is room for one more country. Here, it has been decided to add Hungary to the sample. This decision was made because Hungary can be considered an “extreme” case, as it is an example of the deep infiltration of the anti-gender movement into governmental institutions. Additionally, Hungary is the country most often mentioned in the context of declining LGBTI rights in Europe. This means a small deviation from the approach of stratified random sampling towards an extreme case sample (Patton, 2002, p. 169).

Table 1: List of cases and anti-gender organisations per region

CEE cases		Western European cases	
Latvia	<i>Asociācija Ģimene</i>	Finland	<i>Aito Avioliitto</i>
Hungary	<i>Keresztény Értelmiségiek Szövetsége</i>	France	<i>Manif Pour Tous</i>
Romania	<i>Platforma Civică Împreună</i>	Germany	<i>Familie geht vor!</i>
Slovakia	<i>Alianca za rodinu</i>	Italy	<i>Manif Pour Tous Italia</i>
Slovenia	<i>Iskreni.net</i>	The Netherlands	<i>Gezin in Gevaar</i>

Similarly to CEE, “Western Europe” is a broad label which encompasses many subregions. As described earlier, Western Europe includes all EU member states that do not have a communist past. Merging the EU and UN divisions of the subregions, “Western” EU member states can be divided into: (1) South-West, which are Greece, Spain, Italy, Portugal, and Malta; (2) Central West, which are Austria and Germany; (3) Scandinavia, which are Sweden, Denmark, and Finland, and; (4) North-West, including the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, France, and Ireland (EMIS, 2011). One country was randomly chosen per subregion (see Table 1). To fill up the sample with a fifth case, I decided to add the Netherlands. Besides the fact that I am Dutch and thus will be able to understand the text in its original language, the Netherlands can also, at least in its reputation, be considered an “extreme” case on the flip side of the anti-gender/tolerance divide (Copier, 2021, pp. 173-174; Hekma and Duyvendak, 2011). I would like to emphasise that a country’s reputation regarding LGBTI equality does not necessarily say anything about the actual position of LGBTI people in the country, but it may impact how external actors such as the EU approach the country on the topic of LGBTI rights.

In each country, I looked for an anti-gender organisation of which the views might be representative of the anti-gender positions in the country. The names are noted in Table 1, but for a more extensive discussion of the organisations, see Appendix 2.

Data and operationalisation

According to Lynggaard (2019), in the process of data collection for a discourse analysis, two questions need to be answered: whose discourse, and what is the timeframe? (Lynggaard, 2019, p. 47). This section will first shortly discuss the timeframe, after which the actors of both analyses and the data choices that resulted from this process will be described.

As the goal of this study is to compare the discourses of and adaptation of the EU to anti-gender organisations in CEE and Western Europe, the longitudinal dimension is outside the scope. However, the lack of longitudinal comparison does not mean that timeframe is not relevant; certainly, the timeframes of the first and second analyses are related.

In 2020, the EC released the “LGBTIQ Equality Strategy, 2020-2025” (European Commission, 2020b). Since this strategy lays out the priorities of the Commission regarding LGBTI rights in this period, all their communications on this issue will presumably be congruent with the strategy. Thus, all EU communications data in this study will be from 2020 or later. As this study attempts to discover whether the EU discourse is influenced by the

discourses of the anti-gender movements in the member states, all data for these discourses will be from before 2020. According to Wittenius (2021), the European anti-gender movements first emerged around the mid-2000s, but gained relevance around 2012. For this reason, all the collected data from anti-gender organisations comes from after this year. Thus, the timeframe of the first analysis is 2012-2020, while the timeframe of the second analysis is 2020-present.

Anti-gender discourses: Manifestos of anti-gender organisations

To discover the anti-gender discourse in a country, a prominent anti-gender organisation in each country was chosen – the discourse of the organisations is used as a proxy for the relevant anti-gender discourse in the country. This is valid because the organisations can be seen as the drivers of the movement (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2017, p. 253; Darakchi, 2019, p. 1209). Additionally, many of the selected organisations are not single entities; often, they are alliances of many different organisations, which act under a single name. One prominent example is the French “Manif Pour Tous”, which is a collection of “Catholic organisations, conservative think tanks and bloggers, and intellectuals” (Wittenius, 2021). Thus, by analysing the discourse of Manif Pour Tous, a large part of the French anti-gender movement is covered. A description of the organisation in each country can be found in Appendix 2.

Specifically, the data of the first analysis consists of documents or web pages of these anti-gender organisations, that may represent their views. The choice of the exact data per organisation is dependent on the availability of materials; is the website accessible, how extensive is the information on their website? For this reason, some pieces of data are manifestos, some are the “about us” pages of the organisations. Where these were absent, news articles on the organisations’ websites, and informational texts that the organisations provide as part of initiatives or campaigns were collected. These can be a valid alternative to documents like manifestos, because the articles that organisations write and the campaigns they run are a good reflection of what issues they find important. Links to the pieces of data can be found in Appendix 3.

The advantage of using documents such as manifestos and articles for a discourse analysis is that they are well-suited to the identification of discursive categories. Additionally, they exist independent of the researcher (as is not the case with interviews), meaning that the room for manipulation or tainting of the data is decreased. This is not to say that the researcher does not play a role; through the selection of the exact documents and the theoretical perspective through which the documents are analysed, the researcher has substantial discretion (Lynggaard, 2019, pp. 48-51). Texts from the websites of the anti-gender organisations are

“self-reporting”, meaning that they are produced by the actors themselves. This increases the validity of the argument that these texts represent the priorities and positions of the organisation. Important to note is that the majority of the data collected is in a language I cannot read. Therefore, I make use of the programme DeepL to translate the texts to English. Although this is a highly reliable tool for translation, it is unavoidable that some nuances which may be clear in the source language, such as expressions, and references, will be lost in translation.

EU discourse: Communication by European Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli

To determine the discourse of the European Union regarding LGBTI rights towards CEE and Western audiences, communications by European Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli, were gathered (see Table 2). As Commissioner for Equality, she is responsible for the EU’s LGBTI policy, including the “LGBTIQ Equality Strategy”, launched in 2020. Although all Commissioners are nominated by member states, they do not represent their home country. Instead, they must act in European interests and represent the position of the Commission (Hix and Høyland, 2011, pp. 34-35).

Table 2: Speech and opinion pieces by Commissioner Helena Dalli

Title	Type of text	Date	Author(s)/speaker	Published in/spoken in
Union of Equality: LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025	Speech	November 12, 2020	Helena Dalli	European Parliament
This year, we need Pride’s spirit of solidarity and inclusion more than ever	Opinion piece	June 27, 2020	Helena Dalli, David Furnish, Billie Jean King, Ilana Kloss, Ian McKellen, Skin, Edward Enninfu, Frank Ocean	Le Monde, Het Parool, The Guardian (French, Dutch, and British newspapers)
The European Union as an LGBTIQ Freedom Zone	Opinion piece	May 17, 2021	Helena Dalli	Telex.hu (Hungarian news website)

The communications selected for the second analysis are one speech and two opinion pieces by Helena Dalli. The speech was given in the European Parliament in 2020 in order to announce the launch of the “LGBTIQ Equality Strategy”. It is thus an explication of the intentions and considerations of the Commission when constructing the Strategy. Again, the collection of this data was affected by availability. The original intention was to also analyse speeches by Commissioner Dalli towards CEE and Western European audiences. However, due

to the corona virus and subsequent travel restrictions, Commissioners operated mainly from Brussels and did not travel for events where they would normally give speeches. Instead, the second discourse analysis will look into opinion pieces written by Commissioner Dalli and published in member state newspapers and websites from 2020 onwards. Opinion pieces are a valid measure of the possible intended use of strategic discourse because they are an explicit attempt by an actor to communicate a certain message to a certain audience – opinion writers are “generally allowed to overtly articulate their own points of view on issues and to promote certain policy positions” (Ha, 2017, p. 277; Golan, 2013). In the case of European Commissioners, opinion pieces from their hand can be assumed to reflect the position of the entire Commission.

The first opinion piece was written in collaboration with many American and British LGBTI celebrities, and published in Dutch, French, and British newspapers in commemoration of Pride Month. Although it was written with a group of people, it can be assumed that it still adheres to the standards of the EC as Commissioner Dalli's name would not be attached otherwise. The second opinion piece was published on an independent Hungarian news website in May of 2021, for the occasion of IDAHOBIT. A month after this piece was published, the Hungarian Parliament passed a controversial anti-LGBTI bill, after which the EC started infringement procedures against the government for “breaching guarantees of freedom of expression and non-discrimination” (European Commission, 2021). The opinion piece was thus published a month before the law passed, but it is unclear whether it was affected by prior knowledge of the legislative action that was to come.

Coding of data

The expectations formulated in the theoretical framework have been operationalised into a codebook for discourse analysis, according to the model as based on Mayring (2015) (see Appendix 1.1). As described earlier, the codebook for the first analysis was created using deductive logic, with categories informed by theory. The second analysis however, will be a problem perception analysis with an inductive logic, meaning that the categories will be described on the basis of the text (Mayring, 2015, pp. 375-377). These categories will be focussed on the *formulation of the problem* by the EU; what needs to be solved? However, the theoretical framework formulated two expectations regarding the EU's *reaction* to the perceived problem; will they attempt to re-legitimise their LGBTI policy to the audiences delegitimising it, and how will they respond to anti-trans* discourse? These expectations have been

operationalised beforehand, a slight deviation from the otherwise inductive nature of the second analysis (see Appendix 1.3). For both analyses, the codebook was not finalised before the start of the analysis. As described by Mayring (2015), expected categories may be formulated, but a crucial aspect of discourse analysis is the revision and complementing of the codebook while working through the texts, in order to refine the relevant category system (Mayring, 2015, p. 378).

Chapter 4: Discourses of anti-gender organisations in CEE and Western Europe

The first discourse analysis of this study looks into the anti-gender discourses in ten EU member states: five from CEE, and five from Western Europe. Using the programme ATLAS.ti, these discourses are compared to discover whether and how they differ, and what possible similarities are.

Us versus them: who are we protecting against what?

When articulating a problem, the anti-gender organisations have different ways of referring to its nature; one of the most prominent was coded as the “attack frame”. This frame is visible through use of words such as “violent”, “aggressive”, “annihilation”, for example in these quotes from the French organisation’s manifesto and a Hungarian article about gender education in schools:

“Children are knowingly deprived of a father or a mother: this is an immense violence done to them (...)”

“The Civil Alliance Forum and the Association of Christian Intellectuals have issued a statement rejecting the violent dissemination of LGBTQ propaganda (...)”

The use of an attack frame creates the impression that there is a conflict at hand; there is an attack, thus there must be a defense. But who is doing the attacking, and what needs defending?

When it comes to the target actors of the anti-gender organisations (who, according to them, are a threat), the expectation was that the disparity in political opportunities between countries in Western Europe (where marriage equality is more often institutionalised and accepted) and CEE (where marriage equality is further from being accepted, and not legalised) would lead to different targets. Specifically, the expectation was that Western European anti-gender organisations would more often target trans* people and policies surrounding legal gender recognition and transition.

Table 3: Relative frequencies of the relevant policies to anti-gender movements in CEE and Western Europe

Target policy	Region: CEE	Region: WE
Adoption equality	7,69%	11,35%
Anti-hate speech policy	-	2,84%
Assisted reproduction	2,20%	3,55%
Financial policy	-	3,55%
Gender education	27,47%	12,06%
Gender equality	4,40%	-
Legal gender recognition	2,20%	9,93%
LGBTI education	15,39%	10,64%
LGBTI parenting rights	12,09%	22,70%
Marriage equality	28,57%	21,28%
Surrogacy	-	2,13%
Totals	<i>100,00%</i>	<i>100,00%</i>

Table 4: Relative frequencies of relevant target actors to anti-gender movements in CEE and Western Europe

Target actors	Region: CEE	Region: WE
Gay/Lesbian people	42,11%	30,00%
International institutions	5,26%	-
LGBTI organisations	14,03%	7,00%
Liberals	3,51%	10,00%
National politicians	7,02%	18,00%
Non-binary people	10,53%	16,00%
The EU (institutions)	5,26%	-
Transgender people	12,28%	19,00%
Totals	<i>100,00%</i>	<i>100,00%</i>

This expectation is partially visible in the data. Firstly, contrary to the expectation of the embeddedness of marriage equality in Western Europe, marriage equality remains one of the largest targets of anti-gender organisations in both CEE and Western Europe, although it is slightly less salient in Western Europe (see Table 3). Gay and lesbian people can also expect the most demonisation in both regions (see Table 4). The largest difference lies in what their next priority is; in CEE, the discourse of anti-gender organisations emphasises the threat of “gender education” – the breaking down of gender roles, the promotion of gender equality, and the integrating of this in school curricula. This emphasis on the threat of gender education corresponds with relatively higher saliency of the protection of traditional gender roles and

parental autonomy in CEE discourses (see Table 5). According to the organisations, parents should have the right to determine the education of their children. Additionally, the importance of gender education to CEE anti-gender organisations explains the relative saliency of LGBTI organisations as a threat: most references to LGBTI organisations were made in the context of workshops and camps that they were offering, which would “indoctrinate children into the gender ideology”. The discourse surrounding gender education is exemplified in the following quotes from a Romanian petition/campaign against “gender ideology”:

“(...) our children will learn that it is stereotypically feminine - and therefore must be 'fought' - to give birth to children, to raise them, to educate them, and that it is stereotypically masculine - and therefore must be 'fought' - to try to provide for your family's livelihood and to try, as a man, to protect it.”

“Pupils will no longer learn what we believe to be the duties of women and men. These attributes become mere "gender stereotypes" that violate "gender equality" according to which any gender can equally fulfil the roles of the other gender, or, more simply put, any person, regardless of gender, can equally be any gender they wish.”

Table 5: Relative frequencies of entities to protect for anti-gender movements in CEE and Western Europe

Entity to defend	Region: CEE	Region: WE
Children	15,56%	19,59%
Christian Europe	3,11%	<1%
Free speech	2,67%	6,53%
Heterosexual marriage	12,00%	14,29%
Men	3,56%	<1%
Parental autonomy	6,67%	4,49%
The family	14,22%	18,37%
The nation state/society	7,56%	8,57%
Tradition/morality	12,89%	11,84%
Traditional education	8,89%	8,98%
Traditional gender roles	9,78%	5,71%
Women	3,11%	<1%
Totals	<i>100,00%</i>	<i>100,00%</i>

In Western Europe, the policy with equal saliency to marriage equality is the parental rights of LGBTI couples. This topic is tied to issues of adoption equality, assisted reproduction, and surrogacy, all methods with which same-sex couples may become parents. These three policies were referenced more in Western Europe than in CEE. Subsequently, these discourses show more anger towards national politicians enacting these laws than was visible in CEE, especially if these politicians are ideologically left-wing or liberal. In France, the “governing left” during the Hollande presidency was accused of ridiculing the institution of the “family based on father-mother-child filiation”, while in the Netherlands Ingrid van Engelshoven, former Minister of Education of the liberal D66 party, was accused of “breaking down the traditional family”. LGBTI parental rights are a relevant issue in Western Europe, and are in the discourse often tied to the protection of the institutions of (heterosexual) marriage and the family, and the rights of children. According to the discourse, children have “the right to a father and mother”. This example is from the Finnish organisation *Aito Avioliitto*, but similar claims can be found in the texts by French, Italian, and German organisations:

“In principle, every child has an inviolable natural right to a father and a mother. Where circumstances prevent this right from being realised, adoption must provide the child with a substitute experience of a father and mother.”

Although these focusses are very different, they have one thing that binds them: both gender education and LGBTI family rights are both seen as a threat to the traditional family. Gender education is a threat to the traditional family because it is seen as a threat to the continuation of traditional gender roles, in which the mother stays at home and cares for the children, while the father is the “provider”. LGBTI family rights are a threat because they subvert the “natural” conception of a family as consisting of a mother, a father, and their children.

With the saliency of LGBTI parental rights in Western Europe, the expectation that trans* rights and issues would be most prominent in this region cannot be supported. However, there is evidence that trans* issues are relatively more salient in Western Europe than in CEE. When formulating threats, anti-gender organisations in Western Europe mentioned transgender and non-binary people 15-20% of the time, versus around 10% in CEE. And while there were only two mentions of legal gender recognition in CEE, it was mentioned 14 times by Western European anti-gender organisations, on average twice per text. Essentially, the references made to the threat of legal gender recognition are a rejection of the socialised conception of gender, which sees it as fluid rather than fixed. According to the anti-gender organisations, gender is

firmly entrenched in biology and is immutable. Western European anti-gender organisations most often use biology to justify their arguments; they warn for a “skyrocketing” number of people, especially young people, who would undergo transition if legal gender recognition were made easier. An example of this can be found in the manifesto of *Manif Pour Tous Italia*:

“The proposed law on gender reassignment introduces the possibility that one who does not feel that he corresponds to his sex, by which he is unmistakably characterised since conception, can force by legal act his physical identity to the perceived one, which changes according to one's sensitivity.”

Thus, although trans* issues such as legal gender recognition are not the most salient in Western Europe as was expected, there is evidence that they are more relevant in Western Europe than in CEE. Additionally, this analysis has shown that there is another prominent difference between the discourses of anti-gender organisations in Western Europe and those in CEE: after marriage equality, CEE anti-gender discourse problematises gender education in schools, while Western European anti-gender discourse focusses on the parental rights of LGBTI couples.

Differences between East and West: what are their origin?

The previous section outlined some differences between the discourses of anti-gender movements in CEE and Western Europe. Although it is outside the scope of the initial analysis, this section will shortly speculate over the origin of these differences. While anti-gender movements in both regions problematise marriage equality, the main difference found in the previous section are that Western European anti-gender discourse focuses on LGBTI parenting rights, while the focus in CEE lies on gender education.

One explanation for the salience of gender education issues in CEE could lie in the region's recent history and the role of religion within that history. Although specificities differ, since the start of the post-communist era, religion has played a prominent role in CEE societies. Generally, religious pluralism is low, with one large church (Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant) having a monopoly (Sarkissian, 2010, p. 472; Froese, 2004, p. 57). In this landscape of religious homogeneity, religious identity may become a proxy for national and cultural identity (Müller, 2011, p. 32; Voicu, 2012, p. 334). The current large role of religion in CEE societies could explain the focus on tradition and morality, and is also visible in the frequency of arguments based on religion and/or religious leaders in CEE discourse, compared to a lack of these

arguments in Western Europe (see Table 6). However, to explain why education is an important issue, the Soviet era must be considered. During this time, the relationship between ruling communist parties and religious institutions could be considered antagonistic. The atheistic communist ideology sought to suppress religious influence on society, leading to many religious communities going “underground” (Sarkissian, 2010, p. 479). According to Tomka (1998), in their effort to denounce religion, communist rulers only achieved in instilling people with “a deep mistrust, cynicism, suspicion, and scepticism” for any anti-traditional “cultural transmission” (Tomka, 1998, p. 243). This combined with an urge to protect children (see Table 5) leads to a clear rejection of any education that could counter traditional values, for example regarding gender and sexuality.

When predicting the salience of the issue of marriage equality in Western Europe versus CEE, the political opportunities argument as articulated by Paternotte and Kuhar (2017) failed, as the issue was almost equally salient in both regions. However, this argument could hold some truth when it comes to explaining why LGBTI parenting rights are a salient issue in Western Europe, and less so in CEE. Many Western European countries have legalised same-sex marriage, or have a form of civil unions which grants many of the same rights as marriage (ILGA, 2022b). According to Borten (2002), the distinction between marriage and other contracts historically and legally is that it is presumably foremost a sexual relationship, with procreative potential; the possibility of a couple getting pregnant and starting a family gives the institution of marriage its significance (Borten, 2002, pp. 1127-1128). When same-sex couples are allowed to marry, the discussion of their reproductive capabilities thus comes to the forefront.

Table 6: Relative frequencies of justifications used by anti-gender movements in CEE and Western Europe.

Justification	Region: CEE	Region: WE
Objectivity	6,90%	16,67%
Reference to biology	20,69%	41,67%
Reference to international law	13,79%	6,25%
Reference to national law	41,38%	20,83%
Reference to social science	3,45%	14,58%
Reference to religion/religious leaders	13,79%	-
Totals	<i>100,00%</i>	<i>100,00%</i>

This discussion is often dominated by arguments related to biology; if both are cisgender, same-sex couples are unable to independently become parents. They are thus forced to resort to adoption, surrogacy, or medically assisted insemination, which by anti-gender discourse are considered to be the “antithesis of natural reproduction” (Lasio et al., 2019, p. 506). This focus on biological and scientific arguments in Western European anti-gender discourse was also identified in this analysis (see Table 6). Additionally, anti-gender discourse rejects same-sex parenting on the basis of an ideology of “natural difference”; men and women are seen as fundamentally different but complementary, with fixed roles. Same-sex parenting deviates from these “natural” roles, and would thus be damaging to the child (Butler, 1990; Lasio et al., 2019, p. 505). Thus, the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Western European countries and the subsequent proximity of the discussion surrounding reproduction in same-sex relationships may explain the salience of the issue of LGBTI parenting rights and the frequency of biological arguments in Western European anti-gender discourse.

The European Union: enemy of the people, or irrelevant?

The previous section took the differences found between anti-gender discourses at the beginning of the chapter and speculated about their origin. This section, however, looks at a result of the analysis that contrasts the theory, and shows a similarity between the two regions; the low saliency of the EU in the discourses. The Western European organisations did not refer to the EU at all in their texts. This makes it impossible for the scope of this analysis to measure their perception of EU (institutions). However, other evidence may give an explanation for the low saliency of the EU in Western European anti-gender discourse. As stated earlier, Western European anti-gender organisations refer to national politicians as a threat significantly more often than CEE organisations, 18 versus 7% (see Table 4). This suggests that they see their struggle as primarily based on national issues, although they are ideologically and discursively tied to organisations in other countries. This corresponds with what was described by Paternotte and Kuhar (2017): anti-gender movements share a common “basic discursive alphabet”, which they cater to national political and social contexts (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2017, p. 253).

In CEE texts, two references to the European Union were coded; one which referred to the withholding of funds from Polish municipalities which declared themselves “LGBTI-free zones”, and the other in reference to a European Parliament Resolution from 2019 that supports gender equality. International institutions received the same amount of attention from CEE anti-gender organisations. Based on Korolczuk and Graff (2018), the expectation was that CEE anti-

gender discourse might go so far as describing the EU as a colonial actor (Korolczuk and Graff, 2018, pp. 797-798). The references that were found weakly imply a resistance to the imposition of norms of LGBTI rights and gender equality by the European institutions. However, due to the small number of references, there is no evidence in these texts that the EU and its policy is a salient issue in the discourse of anti-gender organisations; the EU and its institutions are not explicitly and continually communicated as being a threat.

In conclusion, besides their many differences, the discourses of anti-gender organisations in Western Europe and CEE have two similarities: marriage equality remains their most salient issue, and the EU is not constructed as a prominent threat. Both these similarities are not congruent with the expectations formulated in Chapter 2, based on critical theory on East-West relations in the EU and the political opportunities approach.

Chapter 5: EU discourse on LGBTI issues: Issues, perceptions, and presentational strategy

This chapter analyses the communications of European Commissioner for Equality Helena Dalli, to establish whether the European Union is responsive to the discourses of anti-gender movements in the member states. This is done using a problem perception analysis, which inductively examines the problem formulation in Commissioner Dalli's speech and opinion pieces. During the reading of the data, observations were gathered and coded to ease the analysis. Additionally, to be able to test the expectations formulated in Chapter 2, some categories were established beforehand. Both types of categories can be found in Appendix 1.3. The only difference between these two types of categories is the way that they are established; in the analysis, they are used equally and interchangeably.

The structure of the chapter is as follows: first, it is discussed in how far the problem perceptions of the EU reflect those found in Chapter 4. Second, the way that the EU frames LGBTI rights in each region is discussed. Thirdly, the formulation of the "other" by the EU will be compared, and fourthly, presentational strategies used to adjust to different perceived audiences will be analysed. In each section, the speech given by Commissioner Dalli at the presentation of the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy is discussed first, after which the deviations from this text in Western Europe and CEE are examined. This is because this text figures as a control; in this speech, Commissioner Dalli lays out exactly what the priorities and perceived problems are for the EC regarding LGBTI issues. The two opinion pieces are treated as adaptations of this Strategy towards the specific audiences.

As explained in Chapter 3, there is no "smoking gun" in the identification of strategic use of discourse. Instead, it can be assumed when actors engage a competing discourse to counter the anti-gender discourse, and when different discourses are used in different settings.

Issues on the agenda

One of the indications of the strategic use of discourse that could help determine whether the EU adjusts its discourse according to anti-gender movements is whether the EU responds to the problem perception as described by the anti-gender movements. Chapter 4 found that anti-gender movements in both CEE and Western Europe see marriage equality as their largest issue. However, there was a clear difference visible in what came next: CEE anti-gender movements emphasise the danger of gender education, while LGBTI parenting rights are the second-largest

issue in Western Europe. Is this distinction visible in the issues Commissioner Dalli puts on the agenda in her communications towards the different regions?

The short answer is yes, although the evidence is too weak to speak of a clear influence in the context of policy priorities. In all three texts, there was no mention of gender education. However, both the Brussels and CEE text mentioned the problem of bullying in schools, and the need to address it:

“Take for example bullying and stereotyping which go on in schools towards those who are perceived as different. We need to address such discriminations.”

Table 7: Absolute frequency of problems referenced in communications by Commissioner Dalli

Problems	EU	CEE	Western Europe
Anti-gender movements	-	-	1
Bullying	1	1	-
Discrimination (employment)	2	1	-
Discrimination (family)	-	-	3
Discrimination (general)	6	-	5
Hate speech	2	1	-
Homophobia	4	2	3
Transphobia	4	1	4
Violence	4	3	3

There was no mention of bullying, or any issue related to schools in the text aimed at Western European audiences (see Table 7). This could point to a recognition of the struggle surrounding education, which is prominent in the discourse of the CEE anti-gender movement. Again, however, one coding is not enough to speak of a clear connection between the anti-gender problematisation of gender education and the EU’s emphasis on discrimination in education.

There is an indication that the EU was influenced by the anti-gender discourse in Western Europe; where the anti-gender organisations are resisting parental and familial rights for LGBTI couples and their children, Commissioner Dalli repeatedly protects LGBTI parents and “rainbow families” in the text aimed at Western European audiences. At the same time, the CEE text does not mention LGBTI families at all (see Table 8). This points to a recognition of the precarious position of “rainbow families” in Western Europe, where their existence is consistently criticised as “unnatural” by anti-gender movements.

Table 8: Absolute frequency of actors referenced in communications by Commissioner Dalli

Actors	EU	CEE	Western Europe
CEE countries	1	1	-
Bisexual people	1	-	1
Gay people	1	1	1
Intersex people	3	-	2
Lesbian people	1	-	1
LGBTI organisations	-	1	2
LGBTI parents	1	-	3
LGBTI people of colour	-	-	2
Non-binary people	2	-	2
Transgender people	4	1	2
Western European countries	-	1	-

Another difference found in Chapter 4 is the slightly higher salience of trans* related issues like legal gender recognition in Western European anti-gender discourse. Additionally, Chapter 2 formulated the expectation that EU discourse surrounding trans* rights would have no recognition of gender as fluid, and the discrimination faced by trans* and non-binary people because they defy the ingrained conception of gender as binary and fixed. Instead, the focus of discrimination due to gender identity was expected to be on legal and medical issues such as transition and legal gender recognition.

This expectation is not reflected in the data; besides reference to discrimination in the process of gender reassignment and the unnecessary medicalisation of transition, Commissioner Dalli was very clear about the fluidity of gender in her speech in Brussels:

“(...) address difficulties with regard to the recognition of trans and non-binary identities.

Sex and gender, are not two fixed and immutable boxes” [original emphasis]

Additionally, the opinion piece published in Western Europe paid attention to the effects of a fixed conception of gender on trans* and non-binary people:

“(...) trans, non-binary and intersex people experience significantly higher levels of exclusion, harassment, and violence”.

Although the previous two quotes demonstrate that the EU is taking a clear position regarding the recognition of a fluid conception of gender, the analysed texts show no clear proposals for

how this it to be implemented in EU law. It remains to be seen whether this clarity will lead to an improved legal position for trans* people in the Union.

Just as trans* issues have a slightly lower salience in CEE anti-gender discourse, the opinion piece published there had only one short mention of trans* people, but did not formulate the perceived nature of the discrimination. This is congruent with the expectation formulated in Chapter 2 that the EU would reference trans* people and issues more in Western Europe. As a side note, there is a clear lack of diversity regarding references to the LGBTI community in the CEE text anyway; where the opinion piece published in Western Europe pays attention to people who are bisexual, non-binary, trans*, intersex, and lesbian, the CEE text mainly references discrimination and violence experienced by people who are gay (see Table 8).

Thus, the EU discourse shows some indications of being adapted to the priorities of anti-gender discourses in different regions, through the differentiated references to bullying, LGBTI parents and trans* issues. However, the low absolute frequencies of these references means that it is difficult to ascertain a strong connection.

LGBTI rights as part of a diverse “Union of Equality”

This section looks into the EU’s conceptualisations of LGBTI rights, and whether these differ towards CEE and Western European audiences.

“The lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, non-binary, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) equality strategy adopted today is an important milestone towards achieving a Union of Equality.

*It aims at building a Union where **diversity** is celebrated as part of our collective richness. So that all people can be themselves **without risk of discrimination, exclusion or violence.**”*

[original emphasis]

This quote from Commissioner Dalli’s speech at the presentation of the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy is a succinct expression of how the EU views LGBTI rights, which is in two ways. Firstly, the Von der Leyen Commission has as a priority the creation of a “Union of Equality”. The operationalisation of this priority has included the formulation of various strategies and action plans, including the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy (European Commission, 2020d). By including this strategy under this goal, the Commission is creating an explicit link between LGBTI rights and the value of equality, which is protected under Article 2 of the TEU (European Union, 2012a). Through this, LGBTI rights are explicated as a core value of the EU:

“Anti-LGBTIQ hatred or violence, and any practices aiming at “fixing” LGBTIQ people have absolutely no place in the European Union.” [original emphasis]

But what does it mean when LGBTI rights are framed as core values of the EU? On the surface, it may seem as if this frame only aims to portray respect for LGBTI rights as defining the EU; the EU as being at the forefront of LGBTI rights, with the aim of spreading these rights worldwide as a normative power (Manners, 2002). This is not completely far-fetched; in her speech on the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy, Commissioner Dalli expresses the importance of promoting LGBTI rights through external relations:

“We also underscore the EU's firm commitment to promote equality for LGBTIQ people across the globe.” [original emphasis]

However, according to Eigenmann (2022), the framing of LGBTI equality as a core value of the EU is an attempt by the EC to counter and critique internal resistance, and persuade others for the cause. Tying LGBTI rights to a set of treaties which were agreed upon by all member states through accession depoliticises the issue and may thus be a “side-effect of the polarisation within the EU”, rather than an expression of unity (Eigenmann, 2022, pp. 108-111).

The strategic use of the frame of LGBTI equality as a core value of the EU is evidenced by the fact that it is absent in the Western European text, while it is highly utilised in the opinion piece published in CEE (see Table 9). In this text, the EU is described as an “LGBTIQ Freedom Zone”, decision-makers are urged to “uphold European law”, and a clear warning is given: “(...) for the European Commission, respect for LGBTIQ rights is non-negotiable”. Chapter 2 formulated the expectation that the more anti-gender discourse constructs the EU as a threat, the more likely EU discourse is to emphasise LGBTI rights as core values of the EU, as part of a re-legitimation strategy (Rauh et al., 2019, p. 418). This expectation could not be tested with certainty, as Chapter 4 found that anti-gender discourses do not frame the EU as a significant threat. However, the expectation that this frame would be more used towards CEE audiences than those in Western Europe is reflected in the evidence. This might show that there is at least a perception of difference between the discourses in CEE and Western Europe among EU actors, specifically the EC; they feel the need to re-legitimise LGBTI rights and counter resistance in one region and not the other.

Table 9: Absolute frequencies of references to LGBTI rights in communications by Commissioner Dalli

Approach	EU	CEE	Western Europe
Intersectionality	2	-	4
Core value of the EU	5	5	-
Human rights	4	1	1
Personal freedom	4	2	2
Strength of diversity	6	-	3

Why EU actors have the urge to emphasise LGBTI rights as being tied to the EU without this being present in the anti-gender discourse may be explained using literature on politicisation and contestation in the EU. There are two types of contestation towards the EU: contestation of specific policies, and contestation of the entire polity, which rejects the very existence and reach of the EU (Mair, 2007, pp. 9-10). Due to the institutional lay-out of the EU, which splits democratic accountability into various levels with different competences, Mair (2007) argues that policy contestation is often exercised at the wrong level and thus frustrated, leading to it evolving into polity contestation (Hobolt, 2020, p. 623; Mair, 2007, p. 12).

If LGBTI rights were treated as a policy issue, the results from Chapter 4 would disprove Mair’s thesis; contestation of LGBTI policy has not turned into clear polity contestation. However, LGBTI rights have become inextricably tied to the values and identity of European institutions (Eigenmann, 2022, p. 97). Due to this, policy contestation regarding LGBTI rights may be interpreted as contestation of the EU and what it stands for, even without explicit mention of the EU. Challenges to the being of the EU “trigger active justification efforts by those holding executive power” (Rauh et al., 2019, p. 398).

If contestation of LGBTI rights leads to re-legitimisation efforts by EU actors, why is this only visible in the CEE text? A clue resides in another element that is present in both the CEE and Brussels texts but not in the opinion piece published in Western Europe, the explicit rejection of the anti-gender frame that LGBTI equality is rooted in “ideology” that goes against nature:

“(…) The way we are born is not an ideology, the way we are born is nature, is biology, is science.”

“Being yourself is not an ideology. It’s your identity. No one can ever take it away”

Paternotte and Kuhar (2017) explained how the use of the “ideology” frame activates associations with political conspiracies and infiltration – designed to label LGBTI people as a

threat (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2017, pp. 7-8). This frame is present in both Western Europe and CEE: ideology was coded 24 times in total, 13 times in CEE and 11 in Western Europe. The appearance of the ideology frame in communications by the EU is a clear sign of responsiveness to the discourse of anti-gender movements. Additionally, its use towards CEE audiences is a counter to current affairs; in 2020, several municipalities in Poland declared themselves “LGBT-ideology free zones” (Ostrovsky, 2020).

“(...) in some EU countries, regressive practices, such as the so-called ‘LGBT-free zones’ and restrictions on trans persons’ rights, have gained traction and are challenging the mere existence of LGBTIQ people.”

The zones are not only an example of the culmination of anti-gender discourse, but also of how these discourses have been able to enter the realm of political decision-makers in CEE; although the first analysis showed that the ideology frame is equally present in Western European anti-gender discourse as it is in CEE, no comparable declarations have been made in Western Europe. Thus, the EC is responsive to anti-gender movements’ discursive contestation of LGBTI rights, but apparently only when this contestation is present at the political decision-making level.

The second way the EU views LGBTI rights is exemplified by the following quotes from Commissioner Dalli’s speech in Brussels:

“LGBTIQ people exist and are part of our diverse societies everywhere.”

*“All persons are unique, and have different elements in their personality, which is why **intersectionality** will be used as a cross-cutting principle throughout the implementation of the strategy.” [original emphasis]*

This “strength of diversity frame” does not argue that LGBTI rights should be protected because they are human rights and/or tied to a certain perception of the EU, but because they are a crucial aspect of a modern, pluralised and diverse society, where “we have the same freedoms and rights, no matter our personal characteristics”. Just as the core values frame was only visible in the CEE text, the strength of diversity frame was further only coded in Western Europe (see Table 9).

Where does this difference come from? According to Thiel (2015), the protection of LGBTI rights is dependent on two considerations, which are in tension: the transversal ideal of providing “equality for all”, and the particularistic demands of LGBTI groups in member states. The prevalence of either consideration is impacted by the member state context: its policies and

political culture (Thiel, 2015, p. 76). A look at the current embrace of equality policy by member state governments, as investigated by ILGA Europe in the ‘Rainbow Europe 2022’, shows a division in the EU, although there are many nuances: CEE states have an average score of 28, while the average score of Western European member states 60,6 (ILGA Europe, 2022b; see Table 10).

Table 10: Rainbow Scores for EU member states⁴

CEE member state	Rainbow Score	WE member state	Rainbow score
Bulgaria	18	Austria	48
Croatia	45	Belgium	72
Czech Republic	26	Denmark	74
Estonia	36	Finland	60
Hungary	30	France	64
Latvia	22	Germany	53
Lithuania	24	Greece	52
Poland	13	Ireland	53
Romania	18	Italy	25
Slovakia	34	Luxembourg	68
Slovenia	42	Malta	92
		Netherlands	56
		Portugal	62
		Spain	62
		Sweden	68

Additionally, Thiel (2015) ascribes the “equality for all” agenda to Western liberal democracies. Of course, the presence of specific policies does not tell the whole story of LGBTI equality in a certain member state. It does, however, impact the way that the EU approaches the member state when it concerns LGBTI issues, which might create a perceived divide between different regions in the EU by different treatment. The outcome of the earlier mentioned tension is thus that transversal ideals such as diversity prevail in the EU’s approach to Western Europe due to the member states’ perceived embrace of the equality ideal, while the targeted attacks of some CEE governments on LGBTI people and lack of equality policy lead to a more particularistic approach by the EU.

⁴ Source: ILGA Europe (2022b).

The transversal nature of the EU's approach to equality in Western Europe is further exemplified by its emphasis on intersectionality:

“The combination of individual circumstances and identities will also shape the many layers of exclusion that they are exposed to. For instance, women, young people, persons with disabilities and elderly people are at a greater risk. (...) Our response must therefore be inclusive and intersectional.”

Intersectionality as an analytical concept was first developed by Crenshaw (1989) and is the recognition that people are socially located on different intersections of inequalities and marginalisation which impact their lives and experiences in unique ways. Not every gay person experiences homophobia the same; individuals' position on the intersections of race, class, and gender among others also play a role. For policy, an intersectional approach means that the fight against homophobia and transphobia is intertwined with policy against racism, sexism, ageism, and other inequalities (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140; Hankivsky, 2014, pp. 2-3). The emphasis on intersectionality in the Western European and Brussels text while it is not present in the CEE might be explained by the theorised embrace of a broad “equality for all” agenda by Western governments, which is not as prevalent in CEE, where the presence of anti-gender discourse at the decision-making level in some countries leads to targeted attacks on LGBTI communities, such as the “LGBT-ideology free zones” in Poland (Thiel, 2015, p. 76).

This section has confirmed the expectation formulated in Chapter 2 that the EU would place more emphasis on LGBTI rights as core values of the EU towards the CEE audience than towards the Western European audience. This section has also shown that the EU is responsive to anti-gender movements' contestation of LGBTI rights, but only when this is visible at the decision-making level; where this is not present, the EU's conception of LGBTI rights emphasises the strength of diversity and utilises an intersectional frame; it is outside the scope of this study whether or not this intersectional frame is actually translated into policy.

Problem perception: who is the “other”?

Besides the perception of concrete policies as problems, the analysed texts show a difference in perceived level of the problem. When it comes to the diagnosis of the problem, both texts problematise violence and homophobia (see Table 9). However, the core question is: do they see anti-LGBTI sentiment as imposed by repressive leaders, or as a problem deriving from conservative powers in society? Eigenmann (2022) characterises this divide as being between

a geopolitical and a societal “other”. She explains that in the context of the EU, the geopolitical “other” is often CEE countries who are framed as being “backwards”, while the societal “others” are right-wing nationalist movements (Eigenmann, 2022, pp. 109-110). This section will illustrate how this divide is visible in the differences between the two opinion pieces.

Essentially, both opinion pieces establish recent progress, but warn for regression or stagnation. However, they differ in their diagnosis of the problem: where the regression comes from. A geopolitical “other” is created in the opinion piece published in CEE by emphasising the divide between overall progress in Europe and the “regressive practices” by some governments:

“Despite the progress achieved over recent decades, the equality of LGBTIQ people remains elusive (...). More concerning is the fact that in some EU countries, regressive practices, such as the so-called ‘LGBT-free zones’ and restrictions on trans persons’ rights, have gained traction and are challenging the mere existence of LGBTIQ people.”

By using the word “some” in this way, the image is created of these countries as deviating from an overall progressive trend regarding LGBTI rights; where the rest goes forwards, they go backwards. In general, the CEE text utilises the geopolitical approach to LGBTI rights by contextualising them through the laws, values, and symbolic actions of the EU. As described in an earlier section, this opinion piece emphasises the fact that LGBTI equality is considered a core value of the EU, a frame which is not visible in the opinion piece published in Western Europe. As argued by Eigenmann (2022), this contextualisation has the aim of critiquing internal resistance, as exemplified by the policies mentioned in the quote above (Eigenmann, 2022, p. 108).

When one region is discursively constructed as “backwards”, the implication is that the other region is “forwards”. However, the opinion piece published in Western Europe has the thesis that the position of LGBTI people in this region is far from ideal, although for a different reason. Here, a societal “other” is created by emphasising a divide between legislative progress and a tolerant majority, and continuing discrimination and anti-LGBTI sentiment by a minority at the societal level. While the CEE text spoke of “regressive practices”, this text warns for “backlash” after legislative progress:

“In recent decades, various countries have registered some progress (...). Despite this progress, no society has yet achieved LGBTQ+ equality. Additionally, discrepancies remain between legislative standards and the everyday realities of LGBTQ+ people. The prejudice,

the stereotyping, the attitudes take much longer to address and change. Also, the risk of that progress becoming undone remains.”

This discursive divide between legislative and social reality creates the image of a progressive government which fulfils its legislative duties, with many citizens supporting these steps. However, in this image, progress is hampered by a persistent conservative and anti-LGBTI sentiment within society. A general experience of discrimination of and violence against LGBTI people and communities is problematised, and special attention is paid to LGBTI youth living in unaccepting family situations. This discrimination is seen as being partly fed by prominent social movements, who feed backlash by calling for “traditional family”. Here, anti-gender movements are even mentioned explicitly:

Indeed, a backlash is underway, led by the “anti-gender” and “traditional family” movements”.

The explicit mention of anti-gender movements as a problem is clear recognition of the influence they have on society and on attitudes, and the potential they have to cause regression of progress. However, the explicit mention of them as a problem also implies that readers are assumed to be supportive of LGBTI rights, and thus also see anti-gender movements as a problem.

Thus, this section has shown how the EU perceives the problem of anti-LGBTI sentiment differently in CEE and Western Europe. In CEE, a geopolitical “other” is constructed through focus on “regressive” legislative action by some governments. In contrast, the focus in Western Europe lies on conservative social movements which lead to anti-LGBTI sentiment in society, despite progressive legislative action by governments.

Who is the audience? Presentational strategies based on perceived audience

An important part of strategic discourse is the estimation of how certain messages will be received (Lynggaard, 2019). According to Hood (2011), policymakers can use presentational strategies in their communicative discourse, which focus on how the policy and policy-making is communicated, to either politicise or depoliticise an issue (Hood, 2011, p. 18). The discourse analysis of Commissioner Dalli’s opinion pieces found some presentational strategies which will be discussed in this section.

Firstly, strategic adaptation to anticipated reception is visible in the EU's justifications of necessary actions, especially the two that are visible in the CEE text and not in the Western European text. The first is the reference to majority public support:

“A growing percentage of Europeans are in favour of equality for LGBTIQ people.”

Schimmelfennig (2020) described how hiding behind majority preference is a way for decision-makers to “deflect and diffuse blame” (Schimmelfennig, 2020, p. 349). By doing this, the EU is emphasising that it is not just a matter of the EU imposing values of LGBTI equality on member states, it is widely carried by the population. Additionally, a reference to majority support for LGBTI equality in the population can be a counter to governments claiming that the opposite is the case (Wesolowsky, 2021). However, although it might be true that a majority of all Europeans supports LGBTI rights, a 2019 Eurobarometer on the social acceptance of LGBTI people found that this differs widely between member states. On average, 47,7% of CEE citizens accept equal rights for gay, lesbian, and bisexual people versus 83,5% average in Western Europe. Additionally, 33,8% of CEE citizens support legal gender recognition for trans* people, versus 67,9% support in Western Europe (European Commission, 2019).

Another justification is the emphasis on moral responsibility:

“We must do what is morally right, uphold international and European law and even go beyond that, thus ensuring respect towards everyone’s freedom to their own sexuality and gender.”

Just as the emphasis on majority support in the population, the use of moral responsibility as a justification for actions can be interpreted as an attempt to depoliticise proposed policies: *don’t do it because we tell you to, do it because it is your moral duty*. Reference to the protection of tradition and morality is a frame that is present in anti-gender discourses in both CEE and Western Europe (see Table 5). This quote can thus additionally be seen as an effort to counter this narrative: instead of accepting a conception of morality that focuses on the preservation of “traditional” family and gender roles, the use of moral responsibility in this way encourages the inclusion of LGBTI rights into peoples’ frame of morality. Although morality is an equally salient frame in the anti-gender discourse in Western Europe as in CEE, Commissioner Dalli only references moral responsibility in CEE. A possible explanation could be the differing role of religion in the two regions, as discussed in Chapter 4: in CEE, religion has played a prominent role in societies since the start of the post-communist era, with one large Church (Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant) often having a monopoly and a lot of influence (Sarkissian, 2010, p.

472; Froese, 2004, p. 57). At the same time, Western European countries have generally become more secular (Yazid et al., 2014, p. 394). Another possible explanation for this could be the perceived pervasiveness of anti-gender discourse in CEE versus Western Europe, as exemplified by the difference in attitudes measured in the Eurobarometer.

The second example of a strategic choice made by the EU to adjust the emphasis according to the anticipated audience follows from this point. The previous section mentioned how the opinion piece published in Western Europe explicitly mentioned anti-gender movements as a problem, while this is not done in the CEE text. The *explicit* mention of anti-gender movements as a problem assumes that the readers of the opinion piece will share this sentiment. This stands in contrast to the way that anti-gender movements are referenced in the CEE text, as explained in the first section of this chapter. There, the discourses of anti-gender movements are integrated into the justification of the EU itself, as a way of countering them and weakening their argumentative weight. This is done without explicit mention of the movements themselves, which implies an attempt at reframing the discursive tools of anti-gender movements to expand them to include LGBTI equality. According to this estimation, readers need to be convinced to step away from anti-gender convictions, without risking angering them through direct rejection of the movement. This example once again assumes a larger pervasiveness of anti-gender ideology in CEE than in Western Europe.

A third way that Commissioner Dalli adjusts her message to the audience of the opinion piece is the concrete examples of anti-LGBTI sentiment that she uses. The speech in Brussels referenced the LGBT-free zones in Poland, while the Western European piece, has no reference to a concrete incident or piece of legislation. In contrast, the CEE piece makes sure to mention examples in both CEE and Western Europe. This is interesting; although the CEE text creates a geopolitical “other” through the emphasis on regressive practices by CEE governments that do not align with EU values, it is also actively trying to negate this divide, by emphasising that anti-LGBTI sentiment is present all across Europe:

“(...) the hard truth is that there is no safe place in Europe.”

This may be an attempt to soften the perception of a divide and reduce resistance to the message of the opinion piece. The emphasis of an EU-wide problem reduces its accusatory nature: *we are not targeting you, we are observing a problem all over Europe*. The concrete examples of anti-LGBTI sentiment originate from Poland (LGBT-free zones), and Belgium (murder of David Polfiet, a gay man in 2020, which was motivated by homophobia). Interesting to note is that these examples adhere to the divide described in the previous section: the CEE example is

a government action, while the violent WE example is a problem of an individual's homophobia. The recurrence of this divide has consequences for the solutions offered in the opinion pieces.

And these solutions are the fourth example of strategic differences between the text in CEE and Western Europe. Because, while Commissioner Dalli offers up many concrete policy proposals to improve the lives of LGBTI people in Western Europe, she contains herself to one purely symbolic proposal in CEE:

"I (...) call on all government, regional authorities and local councils to consider proactively becoming LGBTIQ Freedom Zones."

This proposal is based on a vote passed by the European Parliament in March 2021, which declared the EU an "LGBTIQ Freedom Zone" (European Parliament, 2021). This declaration was criticised by ILGA Europe for being purely symbolic, and lacking clear action "to align the resolution with the truth of LGBTI people's lives in Europe" (ILGA, 2021b). This discrepancy is an indication as to why the decision was made for symbolic action in CEE: according to Eigenmann (2022), symbolic actions are "not the result of the popularity of the norm, but of its contestedness" (Eigenmann, 2022, p. 111). The emphasis on symbolic action is thus a sign of colliding discourses, in which the EU wants to get the upper hand. Falling back on symbolism instead of concrete policy can be read as an admission of the lack of competences that the EU has in this issue area; its own legislative power is contained to anti-discrimination policy issued through Directives, while issues like marriage, adoption, and medical law remain with member states (FRA, 2021, pp. 17-21). However, it might also be interpreted as a weak choice, originating from a will to placate the reader which is also visible in the other strategic choices mentioned above. Through this lens, the inclusion of concrete and far-reaching policy proposals in the Western European text, which include the inclusion of LGBTI policy in coronavirus recovery plans and the creation of support programmes for LGBTI youth and their parents, signifies that the EU expects to find support here, where it does not expect it in CEE. This assumption may be supported by the nature of the proposals in Western Europe: these are reflective of the transversal ideal as described by Thiel (2015), which supports a broader "equality for all" agenda. Additionally, the assumption is supported by the anti-gender movements themselves; in Western Europe, national politicians were mentioned as a threat to the movement and traditional values 18% of the time, versus 7% in CEE, showing that the anti-gender movements also perceive Western European politicians as being more supportive of LGBTI policy (see Table 4).

Thus, the EU's perception of CEE as a geopolitical "other" in the context of LGBTI rights leads it to approach it differently than it does Western European audiences, in which it perceives the "other" as societal. This is evidenced by the presentational strategies utilised in the opinion pieces: the CEE text includes references to majority public opinion and moral responsibility, counters anti-gender discourse while avoiding naming them directly, emphasises a Europe-wide problem, and offers only symbolic solutions, while the Western European texts does not use these justifications, explicitly names anti-gender movements as a problem, and proposes concrete actions. The discussion in Chapter 2 lead to the expectation that the EU would communicate differently towards different audiences, in order to legitimise its policy. The past three sections on the EU's perceptions of LGBTI rights, formulation of the "other" and the different presentational strategies used show that this expectation is prominently reflected in the data. Additionally, these differences are visible even though they cannot be justified based on the differences between the anti-gender movements as found in Chapter 4. This suggests that the EU might be strategically adjusting its discourse based on the perceived embrace of anti-gender movements in society and subsequently in government, the degree to which LGBTI rights are contested in the higher levels of a member state.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and discussion

The past chapters first analysed and compared the discourses of anti-gender movements in CEE and Western Europe, after which the discourse of European Commissioner Helena Dalli regarding LGBTI rights was analysed, comparing her communications aimed at CEE audiences to those aimed at Western European audiences. After this, conclusions can be drawn. The research question of this study is: *how do the discourses of anti-gender movements in Central-Eastern Europe and Western Europe differ from each other, and how do these differences impact the discourse of the European Commission surrounding LGBTI rights towards different audiences in Central-Eastern and Western Europe?*

The answer to the first question is that anti-gender discourses in CEE and Western Europe differ in that CEE prioritises the issue of gender education, while Western European anti-gender discourse focuses on countering LGBTI parenting rights. Additionally, trans* issues are slightly more salient in Western Europe than in CEE. There are also some similarities between the regions: first, marriage equality is the most important issue in both, and second, the EU is not seen as a relevant threat to the movements or their issues in either. Both these similarities were not expected based on the theory; the political opportunity argument as formulated by Paternotte and Kuhar (2017) predicted that marriage equality would not be an issue in Western Europe, as it is already established in many Western European member states, and it would thus not be politically viable to actively counter it (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2017, pp. 272-274). Critical literature on the relationship between CEE member states and the rest of the EU predicted that anti-EU sentiment would be more salient in this region, especially in the context of LGBTI rights, which have become a symbol with which to oppose the EU (Ayoub and Paternotte, 2017, p. 3).

The answer to the second question, how the found differences impact the discourse of the EU, is more complicated. Firstly, there is some indication that the EU adjusts its priorities regarding LGBTI rights in a certain region to the priorities of the anti-gender movements there, but the low frequency of these references means that it is difficult to conclude that there is a strong connection. The EU adjusts its discourse to that of the anti-gender movements in other ways, through the integration of discourse such as “ideology”, “biology”, and “moral responsibility”, as a way to reframe the anti-gender discourse to include LGBTI equality. This strategic adjustment seems to be mediated by who the receiver of the communication is, however, as this integration is only visible in the CEE text. The EU’s approach to CEE and Western European audiences is characterised by a divide, which is visible in multiple ways.

Firstly, the divide is visible in the way that the EU frames LGBTI rights differently; in CEE, they are framed as core values of the EU, while in Western Europe, they are framed as part of a diverse society, which allows for a more transversal policy approach and a focus on intersectionality. Secondly, the divide is visible in the construction of the “other” by the EU: in the CEE text, the “other” are the conservative CEE countries within a larger progressive Europe, while in the Western European text, they are the conservative social movements within an otherwise progressive society. The discursive divide created between CEE and Western Europe through EU discourse is further evidenced by the use of different presentational strategies. The Western European text proposes a set of concrete policy solutions for society and decisionmakers. In contrast, the CEE text proposes merely symbolic declarations and further justifies action through reference to a broader European problem, and majority public support for LGBTI rights. The divide between the EU’s approach to CEE and Western European audiences cannot be justified on the basis of the differences between the anti-gender movements. This evidence suggests that the EU *does* strategically adjust its discourse to that of the anti-gender movements, but this is dependent on the audience; in this study, adjustment is evidenced only when the movements are perceived to be embraced in society and government, and LGBTI rights are contested at a high level.

This result is relevant, because it adds to the literature on European anti-gender movements by explicating not just that they are present, but that they have a tangible influence on the way the EU communicates about LGBTI issues. Additionally, it added to the literature of discursive institutionalism by affirming the link between the discourse of EU actors and the perceived discursive context in which they operate and the audience to their communicative discourse. Although the EU attempts to increase support for LGBTI equality by emphasising that it is a core value of the Union, and there are no differences between how anti-gender organisations approach the EU, there still remains a clear divide in how the EU approaches different member states on this issue, which is not beneficial for agreement. There is thus still evidence for what Kulpa (2014) calls a relationship of “leveraged pedagogy”, wherein CEE member states are seen as needing to “catch up” with the liberal standards of Western European member states, creating a discursive divide between “queer-friendly” and “homophobic” countries (Kulpa, 2014, p. 432; Ammaturo, 2015, p. 1161).

This conclusion is relevant, because the EU’s ability to sufficiently and vigilantly respond to threats to LGBTI rights in all member states is crucial not only for its legitimacy as a protector of fundamental rights, but also for the safety of LGBTI individuals, families, and communities all throughout the Union. Anti-gender discourse is present in both CEE and

Western Europe, and the perception that one member state has more institutionalised LGBTI rights does not mean that anti-gender discourse cannot become prominent in that member state. To protect and improve the position of LGBTI people within and outside the EU, anti-gender discourse must be countered consistently, no matter in what layer of society it is perceived to be present. This study shows that this is not yet the case. As the “guardian of the treaties”, the EC has an important role in taking up this task. Whether it is facing audiences in Hungary, or in France, LGBTI rights deserve its full commitment.

Like all research, this study has some limitations. When it came to data collection, this study was impacted by the fact that due to the coronavirus, European Commissioners had not travelled for events wherein they could have given speeches. For this reason, the decision was made to use opinion pieces. This created the limitation that it is difficult to determine who a particular “audience” for this piece was; where every present person is the audience of a speech, I was unable to determine who exactly had read each opinion piece. Due to time constraints, I was forced to formulate a limited number of expectations of discourse to test. Additionally, decisions had to be made as to what results were relevant to discuss in the analysis chapters. When it came to coding, I did it on my own. This means that there was no discussion with another researcher as to how to code the texts, which impacts the reliability and validity of the study. I attempted to mitigate this effect as much as possible, by composing extensive code books which include anchor examples, so anyone can check the decisions made in this regard. Finally, because I cannot read any languages other than English and Dutch, I was forced to use a translation software to be able to analyse the discourse of anti-gender organisations. I chose the programme DeepL over Google Translate for its added accuracy, but it is plausible that some nuances in the source language were lost in translation.

This study found that the EU uses different presentational strategies for CEE and Western European audiences. In the second analysis, it was theorised that the EU utilises certain presentational strategies based on the estimation that anti-gender movements and discourse are more pervasive in CEE states than in Western Europe. As the first analysis only looked at the content of the discourse, this remains speculation. Follow-up research could test this theory by using public opinion data to determine to what extent anti-gender sentiment is supported by the populations of EU member states.

The first analysis determined some differences between the discourses of anti-gender movements in CEE and Western Europe. Chapter 4 briefly speculated about the origin of these differences, but it remains just that: speculation, as determining this is outside the scope of this study. Follow-up research could theorise and test some expectations regarding these

differences, including possibly those formulated in Chapter 4 of this study. Finally, this study limited itself to the study of the discourse of the European Commission, operationalised through the opinion pieces and speeches by Commissioner Helena Dalli, who is responsible for equality policy. Other research could look into whether anti-gender discourse has been adopted in the discourse of members of the European Council and/or Parliament, and whether there are differences between MEPs and government leaders from CEE and Western European member states.

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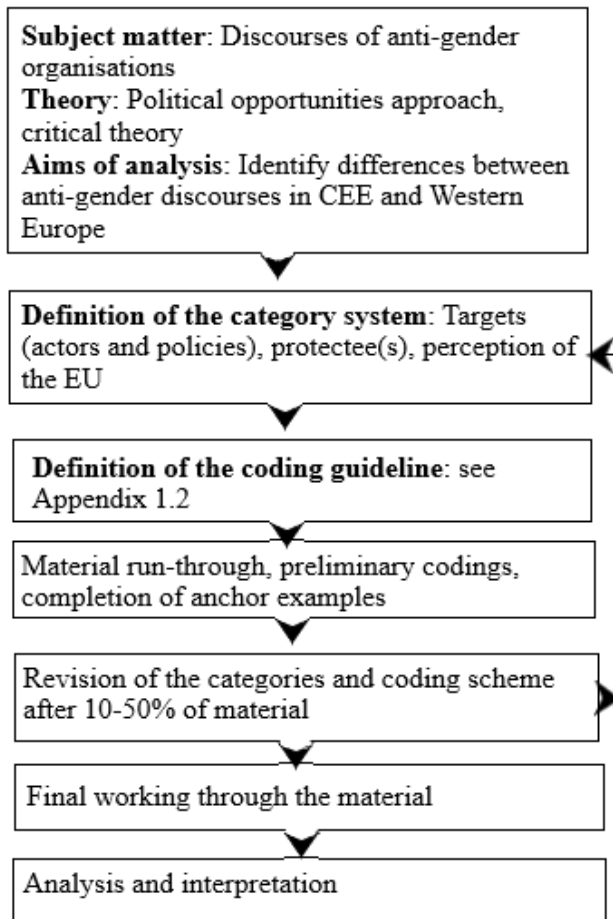
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Model and codebooks

Appendix 1.1 *Process model of deductive qualitative content analysis (Analysis 1), as based on Mayring (2015).*



Appendix 1.2 *Codebook Analysis 1: anti-gender discourse, deductive and inductive*

Topic	Category	Anchor examples
Targets: People/ actors	1. Gay/lesbian people	“We reject the spirit of Pride and LGBTI ideologies.”
	2. International institutions	“Here is the definition of gender contained in United Nations material.”
	3. Liberals	“Aggressive liberal sensitisation”
	4. LGBTI organisations	“Parents were rightly concerned to find out that a workshop on hate speech was being given by the Pride association at their primary school.”
	5. National politicians	“The current governing left sees marriage as a place of inequality.”

	6. Non-binary people	“We recognise that human gender is composed of men and women.”
	7. The EU (institutions)	“Brussels has refused to fund twinning programs for six right-wing Polish municipalities that have declared themselves free of LGBTQ ideology.”
	8. Trans* people	“Our created gender cannot be changed.”
Targets: Policies	1. Abortion	“Human life must be protected from the moment of conception until natural death.”
	2. Adoption equality	“External adoption for same-sex couples is not in the best interests of the child. Two fathers cannot replace the mother of a child, and two mothers cannot replace the father.”
	3. Anti-hate speech policy	“Bill on countering homophobia and transphobia: A gag law.”
	4. Assisted reproduction	“The extension of the PMA to single women and female couples is not without consequences: it would deprive children of their father and all their paternal family.”
	5. Divorce	“Issues against our Christian morality: homosexuality, transgenderism, and divorce.”
	6. Euthanasia	“Human life must be protected from the moment of conception until natural death.”
	7. Financial policy	“Establish financial justice for families: families with children are structurally disadvantages in tax and social security.”
	8. Gender education	“We call for an immediate end to state funding of gender and LGBT projects and the indoctrination of children in schools and kindergartens through gender ideology and the shameful “sexual pedagogy of diversity”.”
	9. Gender equality	“Gender equality means the annihilation, the dissolution of this gender gap between men and women.”
	10. Gender mainstreaming	“Gender ideology wants the mainstreaming of gender in textbooks.”

	11. Legal gender recognition	“People who are unable to identify with their own gender should be helped to accept their biological gender.”
	12. LGBTI education	“The position of parents and teachers is clear: political and sexual ideological content is not appropriate for children.”
	13. LGBTI parenting rights	“Ensure that the child has a family model of both mother and father, including in the case of adoption.”
	14. Marriage equality	“Growing challenge to understanding marriage as a union between a man and a woman and a family.”
	15. Surrogacy	“Surrogacy, a lucrative practice that shatters filiation.”
Entity to protect: Who or what is the enemy threatening?	1. Children	“Protect our children from the LGBTQI ideology that has affected and misled them lately.”
	2. Christian Europe	“We urge everyone to represent these traditional values consistently and credibly in both private and public life, because the successful future of (...) Europe can only be built on these foundations.”
	3. Free speech	“No one should feel subjected to pressure or public stigmatization because they do not accept a redefinition of marriage”
	4. Heterosexual marriage	“The important role of marriage as an institution is to unite a man and a woman.”
	5. Men	“This inevitably leads to the psycho-physical destruction of man.”
	6. Parental autonomy	“Parents have the right and duty to maintain, educate, and bring up their children.”
	7. The Church	“The aim of gender ideology is to counter the education of the Church.”
	8. The family	“We recognise that the family is the basic cell of society”
	9. The nation state	“A strong nation is built on strong families.”
	10. Traditional education	“Development and support of an educational policy that aimed at the moral and value education of children and young people.”

	11. Traditional gender roles	“Defending the very being of women and men cannot be criminalised under any name.”
	12. Tradition/ morality	“We encourage everyone to consistently and credibly represent this traditional value system in both private and public life.”
	13. Women	“If society loses the ability to distinguish between women and men, the fight against violence against women becomes an unfulfilled commitment.”
Representation of the EU	1. EU as an imposer of policy	“The plenary of the European Parliament adopted on 13.02.2019 a Resolution in which it imposes gender equality on the school curriculum.”
	2. EU as an undemocratic institution	“The liberal European Union acts without asking the people”
Framing of LGBTI rights (progression)	1. Agenda/conspiracy	“In line with the ideological vision – widely promoted by opinion leaders, politicians, and media.”
	2. Attack frame	“Attacks and dangers from the transgender movement and how you can protect your child.”
	3. Conflict frame	“A substantive conflict between the LGBT lobby and the national side among our Polish friends.”
	4. Totalitarian	“School administrators describe the KGB-methods of the educational inspection and LGBT lobby.”
Justification of anti-gender stance	1. Objectivity	“Non-profit, religiously and politically independent organisation”
	2. Reference to biology	“Gender is not a social construct but a scientifically proven biological fact.”
	3. Reference to national law	“Article 29(6) of the Romanian Constitution”
	4. Reference to international law	“UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948),: Article 26, paragraph 3.”
	5. Reference to European law	“As described in the EU’s human rights conventions”
	6. Reference to experts	“We can also turn to the experts we count on to support us”

	7. Reference to history	“Marriage as a man and a woman is known practically throughout history in all human societies”
	8. Reference to social sciences	“We also note that 92% of the French consider that the nuclear family is “a father, a mother, and their children”.”
	9. Reference to religion/ religious leaders	“Let us not forget what Pope John Paul II said...”
Tactics	1. Complaints	“Parents got involved and made it clear that they are opposed”
	2. Demonstration	“We are calling for demonstrations (currently online)”
	3. Legal action	“If the school’s activities conflict with parents’ personal values, we can invoke...”
	4. Media attention	“We are visible at the national level, including through public service media.”
	5. Movement building	“Companies, associations, and other organisations can support us by becoming a community member.”
	6. Petition	“Campaign to collect signatures”
	7. Political action	“Protection of such a family must be ensured through public policy, legislation, and planning documents.”
	8. Promotion of traditional “lifestyle”	“We urge everyone to represent these traditional values consistently and credibly in both private and public life.”

Appendix 1.3: Codebook Analysis 2: EU's problem perception, inductive and deductive

Topic	Category	Anchor example
Problems	1. Anti-gender movements	“The risk of progress becoming undone remains. Indeed, a backlash is underway, led by the “anti-gender” movements.”
	2. Bullying	“Take for example bullying and stereotyping which go on in schools towards those who are perceived as different.”
	3. Cancelled Prides (COVID-19)	“Due to the coronavirus, Pride events are either happening online or not at all.”
	4. Conversion therapy	“Conversion practices targeting LGBTIQ people have to stop.”

	5. Discrimination at work	“We will ensure rigorous application of the Employment Equality Directive to prevent discrimination in the workplace.”
	6. Discrimination in personal sphere	“For some of us, home is not a safe place.”
	7. General discrimination	“The experience of discriminations against LGBTIQ people in the EU increased in recent years.”
	8. Hate speech	“We must tackle hate speech, including those targeting LGBTIQ people.”
	9. Homophobia	“It shows us how far homophobia goes if left unaddressed.”
	10. Intersex genital mutilation	“Non-vital surgery and medical intervention on intersex infants and adolescents without their fully informed consent.”
	11. Medicalisation	“Homosexuality was classified as a mental disorder.”
	12. Medicalised transition	“Forced medicalisation of trans people”
	13. Mental health problems	“This leads to increased mental health problems.”
	14. Racism	“We must pay particular attention to (...) the most marginalised, including those experiencing intersectional discrimination.”
	15. Transphobia	“Trans, non-binary and intersex people experience significantly higher levels of exclusion, harassment and violence.”
	16. Violence	“We learn that during lockdowns, young LGBTQ+ people (...) have been subjected to violence.”
Referenced actors	1. Bisexual people	“We must fight for a future where people of all sexual orientations have the opportunity to live free from discrimination.”
	2. CEE countries	“Some EU countries show regressive practices, such as the so-called ‘LGBT-free zones’”
	3. Gay people	“In Belgium, on 6 March, forty-two-year-old David Polfiet was stabbed to death after he was lured to a meeting via a gay dating app”
	4. Intersex people	“We must counter the erasure of intersex people”
	5. Lesbians	“We must fight for a future where people of all sexual orientations have the opportunity to live free from discrimination.”
	6. LGBTI organisations	“Organisations face existential risks as they struggle to access funding, support their

		communities and continue to administer their services.”
	7. LGBTI parents	“Recognise rainbow families”
	8. LGBTI people of colour	“Black and ethnic minority people have always been a vibrant part of the LGBTQ+ community.”
	9. LGBTI youth	“Young people who must live in hostile, homo/transphobic, unaccepting, and abusive families.”
	10. Non-binary people	“We must address difficulties with regard to the recognition of trans and non-binary identities.”
	11. Trans* people	“We must address difficulties with regard to the recognition of trans and non-binary identities.”
	12. Western European countries	“In Belgium, on 6 March, forty-two-year-old David Polfiet was stabbed to death after he was lured to a meeting via a gay dating app”
Solutions	1. Action plans	“I invite all member states to develop their own action plans on LGBTIQ equality.”
	2. Anti-discrimination legislation	“Improve legal protection against discrimination”
	3. Community care	“Community support networks active around Pride provide a lifeline for those who experience daily isolation. When other services fail, the LGBTQ+ community steps in.”
	4. Declaration	“Encourage states to proactively become LGBTIQ Freedom Zones”
	5. Diversity and inclusion policies	“(…) promoting diversity and inclusion policies”
	6. Exchange best practices	“Exchanges of best practices between EU countries will continue to be facilitated by the European Union.”
	7. Gender education	“Take for example bullying and stereotyping which go on in schools towards those who are perceived as different. We need to address such discriminations.”
	8. Government care	“In some countries this is compounded, as access to crucial healthcare, such as HIV treatment and gender-affirming care, has been restricted or deemed “non-essential”, to the detriment of the wellbeing of those concerned.”

	9. Mainstreaming	“Coronavirus recovery plans should therefore recognise and address the systematic prejudices and inequalities exposed by this crisis.”
	10. Visibility	“Breaking the secrecy and isolation is crucial in fostering positive affirmation of LGBTQ+ lives.”
Type of action	1. Between member states	“Exchanges of best practices between EU countries will continue to be facilitated by the European Union.”
	2. Bottom-up action	“Calling on EU institutions, Member States and EU agencies, in partnership with civil society organisations, social partners and the private sector to foster the equality that we are promoting.”
	3. Collaboration	“Calling on EU institutions, Member States and EU agencies, in partnership with civil society organisations, social partners and the private sector to foster the equality that we are promoting.”
	4. Concrete proposals	<i>Any policy/action proposal that includes concrete policies and steps to take, and by whom.</i>
	5. European level	“The Commission will make full use of the tools at its disposal.”
	6. Member state level	“I invite all member states to develop their own action plans on LGBTIQ equality.”
	7. New legislation	“The Commission will put forward any legislation required.”
	8. Old legislation/ implementation	“We will also ensure that the gender equality strategy is implemented correctly.”
	9. Societal level	“The prejudice, the stereotyping, the attitudes take much longer to address and change.”
	10. Symbolic action	“While this vote was essentially symbolic, it was a significant stand at a time when LGBTIQ rights are being challenged.”
	11. Top-down action	“Politicians must act fast, especially if lives are at risk.”
Justification/ call to action	1. Majority opinion	“While a growing percentage of Europeans is in favour of equality for LGBTIQ people, (...)”
	2. Moral responsibility	“We must do what is morally right (...)”
	3. Progress continuation	“In recent decades, various countries have registered some progress in this area of policy.”

	4. Regression	“Also, the risk of that progress becoming undone remains.”
	5. Stagnation	“Moving backwards or standing still are not options”
	6. Urgency	“It is time to up the ante”
Approach to LGBTI issues	1. Gender fluidity	“Sex and gender are not two immutable boxes.”
	2. Intersectionality	“All persons are unique, and have different elements in their personality, which is why intersectionality will be used as a cross-cutting principle throughout the implementation of the strategy.”
	3. LGBTI rights as core value of the EU	“Anti-LGBTIQ hatred or violence, and any practices aiming at “fixing” LGBTIQ people have absolutely no place in the European Union.”
	4. LGBTI rights as human rights	“LGBTIQ rights are human rights, and should be enjoyed fully everywhere and at all times.”
	5. LGBTI rights as linked to democracy/rule of law	“We must do what is morally right, uphold international and European law and even go beyond that, (...)”
	6. Personal freedom	“We want to build a European Union where all of us can thrive, where all of us will have the opportunity to reach their full potential.”
	7. Strength of diversity	“Diversity is a strength, let’s celebrate it.”
Problem perception of trans* and non-binary discrimination	1. Erasure/Lack of recognition of gender fluidity	“We must address difficulties with regard to the recognition of trans and non-binary identities.”
	2. Violence/harassment	“Trans, non-binary and intersex people experience significantly higher levels of exclusion, harassment and violence.”
	3. Discrimination during transition	“We will also ensure that the gender equality strategy is implemented correctly which regards its coverage to gender reassignment.”
	4. Medicalisation	“Forced medicalisation of trans people”

Appendix 2: Justification selection anti-gender organisations

To discover the discursive configurations of the anti-gender movements in different EU member states, the manifestos, founding documents, position statements, news articles, or campaign texts by prominent anti-gender organisations in those countries will be analysed using a qualitative content analysis (see the codebook in Appendix 1). These anti-gender organisations were all chosen for their prominent position in the anti-gender movement, their opinion-making power in the country, and/or their ties to governments, which allows for the assumption that their positions are more or less representative for those in the local anti-gender movement. This appendix will shortly discuss each organisation.

CEE cases

Hungary: Keresztény Értelmiségiek Szövetsége (KÉSZ), Federation of Christian Intellectuals

The Hungarian Federation of Christian Intellectuals is not an anti-gender organisation in the sense that it campaigns exclusively against issues surrounding gender and sexuality. However, this organisation originates in academia, specifically theology. It propagates religious nationalism, stating on its website that “Christianity and Hungarianness form the closest unity in the history of our nation”. In this nation, the organisation sees an important role for the nuclear family. KÉSZ has the support of the Hungarian government; in 2017, prime minister Viktor Orbán spoke at its annual congress (Office of the Prime Minister, 2017).

Latvia: Asociācija Ģimene, Association Family

The Latvian organisation Asociācija Ģimene is a non-governmental organisation that, according to its website, “unites non-governmental organisations, specialists and activists with a strategic vision and a complex approach to find the most effective solutions for supporting and strengthening Latvian families”. Its position is articulated shortly by its Twitter biography (as of May 2, 2022): “pro-marriage, pro-family, pro-life, pro-child”. It is a large organisation, with forty members. It also collaborates with members of the Saeima (Latvian parliament) and local governments.

Romania: Platforma Civică Împreună, Civic Platform Together

In 2018, a coalition of conservative organisations in Romania, the Coaliției pentru Familie (Coalition for the Family), gathered enough signatures for a national referendum to anchor the definition of marriage in the Romanian constitution as being between a man and a woman. This

referendum failed, as not enough people turned up for a valid vote. After this, the Coalition largely dissolved (Filip, 2022). However, prominent actors within the coalition have teamed up again to form a civil platform, Împreună. According to its website, over 500 NGOs are members of the platform.

Slovakia: Aliancia za Rodinu, Alliance for the Family

Aliancia za Rodinu, according to its website, is an alliance of over ninety Slovakian civil society organisations, which was founded to “join forces to support marriage and the family, given the growing challenge to understanding marriage as a union between a man and a woman and a family”. It has broad support from many churches in Slovakia, including the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Catholic Church, the Evangelical, and the Reformed Christian Church (LifeNews, 2014).

Slovenia: Iskreni.net, iskreni.net

Iskreni.net is a Slovenian website and, according to itself, “one of the strongest civil society organisations in Slovenia”. Besides the articles on the website and physical publications, the organisation offers programmes and workshops for families, as well as organising a yearly “Family Festival”. Iskreni.net was established in 2008 as an online forum, and grew into a media company once “[they] discovered the inaccessibility of existing mainstream media”. According to the organisation, its website has more than 100,000 readers.

Western European cases

Finland: Aito Avioliitto Ry, Genuine Marriage Association

Aito Avioliitto is a non-governmental organisation founded in 2015. In this same year, they introduced a citizen’s initiative aimed at repealing equal marriage legislation before it could enter into force. Although the initiative gained the necessary support to be discussed in Parliament, it could not count on a legislative majority. According to the organisation’s website, Aito Avioliitto “actively participates in the debate in a pluralistic society, so that the classical view of marriage can also have its voice heard equally”.

France: Le Manif Pour Tous, The Strike For All

Le Manif Pour Tous was created in 2012, in reaction to the legalisation of same-sex marriage and adoption. Since then, the organisation has been active on issues such as surrogacy, assisted

reproduction, and legislation surrounding the legal status of the parent, among others. According to the website, its objective is to “promote the well-being and the future of children, adults and society as a whole”. Over the years, Manif Pour Tous has become prominent in the European anti-gender movement, as well as in the French Catholic-right movement.

Germany: Familie geht vor!, Family Comes First

Familie geht vor! is an alliance of organisations “for marriage and family”. In June 2020, the alliance attempted to stage a “family demonstration”, but this was not able to continue due to the corona virus measures at that time. One of the most prominent organisations within the alliance is Demo Für Alle, or Demo for Everyone. However, this organisation is currently rebuilding its website (as of May 2022), meaning that data for this organisation cannot be accessed. Instead, the decision was made to analyse the organising text of the alliance’s demonstration, which falls mostly under the responsibility of Demo Für Alle (according to the webpage).

Italy: La Manif Pour Tous Italia, The Strike For All Italy

La Manif Pour Tous Italy is an organisation that is closely linked to the French organisation with the same name, although it is independently run. Next to being a civil society organisation, it also has a lobbying function, lobbying against laws on homophobia, and the legalisation of civil unions in Italy. LMPT Italy has organised demonstrations, which it calls “Family Days”. Politically, the group has sided with far-right parties such as Lega Nord, Forza Italia, and Fratelli d’Italia.

The Netherlands: Gezin in Gevaar, Family in Danger

Gezin in Gevaar is part of the larger Catholic organisation Civitas Christiana, which is part of the global Catholic and anti-gender Tradition, Family, and Property Network (TFP). Gezin in Gevaar aims to “protect the family”, and sees marriage as a coupling between “a man and a woman, aimed at having children together”. The organisation is gaining prominence, with appearances on public broadcast, and collaborations with Christian and far-right political parties.

Appendix 3: Data for the analysis of anti-gender discourse

Country	Name	English name	Website	Data for analysis
Hungary	Keresztény Értelmiségiek Szövetsége	Federation of Christian Intellectuals	https://www.keesz.hu/	“KÉSZ stands by the traditional morality and family model”, July 2014 - https://www.keesz.hu/a-kesz-kiall-a-hagyomanyos-kozerkolcs-es-csaladmodell-mellett “Stop liberal brainwashing and protect our children!”, September 2020 - https://www.keesz.hu/allitsuk-meg-a-liberalis-agymosast-es-vedjuk-meg-gyermekeinket
Latvia	Asociācija Ģimene	Association Family	http://asociacijagimene.lv/	“Memorandum for strengthening family values”, November 2018 - http://asociacijagimene.lv/memorands/
Romania	Platforma Civică Împreună	Civic Platform Together	https://platforma-impreuna.ro/	“Campaign against gender ideology”, 2018 - http://platforma-impreuna.ro/campanie-ideologie-de-gen/
Slovakia	Aliancia Za Rodinu	Alliance for Family	https://www.alianciazarodinu.sk/	“Alliance Declaration of the Family”, December 2013 - https://www.alianciazarodinu.sk/o-nas/ciele-azr-manifest/
Slovenia	Iskreni Institute	Iskreni Institute	https://www.iskreni.net/	“Opinion of the iskreni.net Institute on the proposal of the ‘Partnership Act’”, November 2014 - https://www.iskreni.net/mnenje-zavoda-iskreni-net-ob-predlogu-zakona-o-partnerski-skupnosti/ “More and more ideological content – what can we do?”, October 2019 - https://www.iskreni.net/starsi-na-slovenski-osnovni-soli-preprecili-izvajanje-lgbt-delavnice-ideoloskih-vsebin-vse-vec-kaj-lahko-storimo/
Finland	Aito Avioliitto	Genuine Marriage	https://aitoavioliitto.fi/	“Information About Us”, January 2019 - https://aitoavioliitto.fi/tietoa_meista/
France	Le Manif Pour Tous	The Strike for All	https://www.lamanifpourtous.fr/	“Family Policy and Interest of the Child”, September 2016 - https://www.lamanifpourtous.fr/publications/politique-de-la-famille-et-interet-de-lenfant
Germany	Familie geht vor!	Family Comes First	https://familie-geht-vor.com/	“I’m demonstrating online: Family comes first!”, April 2020 - https://www.citizenngo.org/de/fm/178712-ich-demonstriere-im-netz-familie-geht-vor
Italy	Le Manif Pour Tous Italia	The Strike for All Italy	http://www.lamanifpourtous.it/	“Manifesto of La Manif Pour Tous Italy”, 2013 - http://www.lamanifpourtous.it/sitehome/manifesto/
Netherlands	Gezin in Gevaar	Family in Danger	https://geziningevaar.nl/	“Stop the forcing of sexuality in our schools”, 2022 - https://geziningevaar.nl/petities/teken/stop-het-opdringen-van-seksualiteit-op-onze-scholen “Keep gender propaganda out of textbooks!”, 2018 - https://geziningevaar.nl/petities/teken/hou-genderpropaganda-uit-de-schoolboeken

